

TENNYSON, RUSKIN, MILL

AND

OTHER LITERARY ESTIMATES

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BY

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NOTE

THIS volume was planned, and in great part written, several years ago, as a series of systematic estimates of some leading influences on the thought of our time. The study of Tennyson, the first of these chapters, has awaited the re-issue of his principal poems in a popular form. Most of the other studies have appeared in the *Nineteenth Century*; that on Lamb and Keats in the *Contemporary Review*; those on Gibbon in the *Forum* of New York. The author has to express to the Editors and Proprietors of these Reviews his grateful thanks for the courtesy which enables him to use them.

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CHAPTER I

TENNYSON

ONCE only in the history of our literature in verse, and once in prose, has there been seen a royal suzerainty, maintained over an entire epoch by a single writer, to be compared to that by which Alfred Tennyson has dominated Victorian poetry. The supremacy held by Alexander Pope over his immediate contemporaries and that held by Samuel Johnson over his, were as great and far more autocratic. But in the half-century that has passed since Tennyson became Poet Laureate, his authority over poetic form has been paramount, as his superiority to all poets of the time is above question or doubt. His flower, to adopt his words of proud humility, has truly 'worn a crown of light.' Most writers of verse can raise the flowers now. They sow it far and wide by every town and tower. All have the seed from Alfred Tennyson. But the cynic who should call it a weed would be flayed alive, as was Marsyas by Apollo. The people, the critics, the poets with one voice continue to cry, 'Splendid is the flower!' And so say we all.

This royal prerogative enjoyed by Alfred Tennyson, in death as in life, has had some inconveniences, inherent in all royalties. It has placed him not only, as they say in French academies, *hors concours*—above competition, above criticism, above discussion—but

almost above free judgment and honest understanding of his fine qualities and his true place in English poetry. No loyal subject would presume to noise abroad a true and impartial estimate of the character and endowments of a reigning sovereign. And so, it has seemed to us all unmannerly, in the nineteenth century, to discuss the poems of Tennyson with the cool freedom that will certainly be applied to them in the next and succeeding centuries. He has never been judged as we judge Byron, Shelley, Keats, or Wordsworth. Since he won his just place as the poet of the Victorian era, he has not been treated as mere poet, or citizen of the immortal Republic of Letters. He has been, like 'Mr. Pope' or 'The Doctor,' invested with a conventional autocracy, and is spoken of in the language of homage, under pain of some form of *lèse-majesté*. It is far too early to anticipate the judgment of our successors on the place of Tennyson in English poetry. It is not too early to speak of him with freedom and honest admiration, disdaining any spurious loyalty and the whispered humbleness which royal personages expect. To continue this still would be false homage to our glorious literature and to one of the finest poets who adorn its roll.

As Homer was for all Greece *the poet*, so for the second half of the nineteenth century Tennyson has been 'the Poet'—his devotees spoke of him as 'the Bard'—holding a place quite analogous to that of Hugo in France; for he and Victor both 'darkened the wreaths of all who claimed to be their peers' in England as in France. No one denies that in England, as in France, there were men of genius who have written admirable verse. *Vixere fortes cum Agamemnone.* All men of sense feel the original genius of

Robert Browning, his unique gift, his subtle power. All men of taste feel the magic of Swinburne's luscious music, his thrill of passion and scorn. One need not go through the list of the sixty-two so-called 'minor poets,'—'some are pretty enough, and some are poor indeed!' Yes! but the cool judgment brings us back to this, that though one or two men in these fifty years past have given us poems of resplendent genius, and some scores have written verses of extreme felicity and grace, and many hundreds of men and women have composed pieces 'pretty enough,' the prevalent perfume is always that of the Tennysonian flower; the lyre, whoever strikes it, gives forth the Tennysonian love-note of its own motion—*ἁ βάρβιτος δὲ χορδαῖς ἔρωτα μοῦνον ἀκεῖ*—and Alfred Tennyson holds an indisputable laureate crown as completely as ever did Victor Hugo in France.

The crown has been won, partly by the fact that Tennyson embalmed in exquisite verses the current tastes, creeds, hopes, and sympathies of the larger part of the reading public in our age, but mainly it was won by the supreme perfection of his form. In early life he formed a poetic style of his own, of quite faultless precision—musical, simple, and lucid. And in sixty years of poetic fecundity, his style may have gained in energy, but not in precision. It was never careless, never uncouth, never (or rarely) obscure. Every line was polished with the same unerring ear and the same infallible taste. In some sixty thousand lines it is rare to find a really false rhyme, a truly bungling verse, a crude confusion of epithets, or a vile cacophony—such ragged stuff as Byron flung off on almost every other page, such redundancies as Shelley or Keats would pour forth in some hour of delirious rapture, such rank

commonplace as too often offend us in Wordsworth, even when he is not droning of malice prepense. Verses so uniformly harmonious as those of Tennyson, with their witchery of words, yet so clear, so pure, so tender, so redolent of what is beautiful in nature, in man, in woman—all this won over the entire public that cares for poetry, and truly deserved to win it.

Even now full justice has hardly been done to Tennyson's supremacy in form; or rather, the general reader, much as he loves his poems, is not quite aware of the infallible mastery of language they possess. In the whole range of English poetry, Milton alone can be held to show an equal or even greater uniformity of polish. Perfection and continuity of polish are certainly not the same thing as the highest poetry, but they are the note of the consummate artist. English poetry, for all its splendid achievements, is not remarkable for uniform perfection of form, as compared with the best poetry of Greece, of Rome, and of Italy. Shakespeare himself (or perhaps it is his editors, his printers, or his pseudonyms) will at times break out into rant, and he is inordinately prone to indulge in conceits and quips. Nearly all our poets have their bad days—become careless, reckless, or prosy; lose complete self-control; or commit some error of taste, be it in haste, in passion, or some morbid condition of the creative fancy. Gray always writes like the scholar and critic that he was, and Pope always writes with the neatness of a French 'wit.' But neither can uniformly avoid the commonplace, and thus they cannot claim the crown of absolute poetic form. Milton, if we can forgive the prolixity of his old age, never descends in his eagle's flight from the lofty perfection of form. And more than all other poets, Tennyson, if he never soars to such heights as

Milton, maintains this wonderful equality of measured beat.

'IN MEMORIAM'

This unfaltering truth of form reaches its zenith in *In Memoriam*, which must always remain one of the triumphs of English poetry. It would be difficult to name any other poem of such length (some three thousand lines) where the rhythm, phrasing, and articulation are so entirely faultless, so exquisitely clear, melodious, and sure. Subtle arguments of philosophy and problems of faith are treated with a grace equal to the ease and the lucidity of the expression. There is not a poor rhyme, not a forced phrase, not a loose or harsh line in the whole series. The rhymes, the assonances, the winged epithets are often of astonishing brilliancy, and yet they seem to flow unbidden from some native well-spring of poetic speech. Such ease, certainty, and harmony of tone imply consummate mastery of the poet's instrument; for not a stanza or a line looks as if it had cost the poet any labour at all, and yet every stanza and line looks as if no labour of his could ever make it more perfect. This is indeed a quality only to be found in our best poems, of which Milton has given us the immortal type. And though *In Memoriam* is far from being such glorious poetry as *Lycidas*, it shares with *Lycidas* itself consummate mastery of its own form of poetic language.

One of the main feats of this mastery of form is the extraordinarily beautiful and appropriate metre in which this poem is cast. Tennyson must be considered to have founded the typical metre for this meditative and elegiac lyric. Even if it had been occasionally used before in the seventeenth century, Tennyson gave

it the development and perfection it has for us. It has become the natural mode for this reflective and mournful poetry; it is superior, no doubt, to the metre of Milton's *Il Penseroso*, or that of Marvell's *Thoughts in a Garden*, Byron's *Elegy on Thyrza*, or Coleridge's *Geneviève*. The ease, force, and music of this quatrain in Tennyson's hands are wonderful—the ease equalling the force, the music equalling the ease. As in all meditative poems on a single theme, we find stanzas which we could well spare. But the pieces which are best known and have become household words, especially the first ten elegies with the famous *Introduction*, are masterpieces of exquisite versification, several of them may stand beside some of the happiest stanzas in our poetry. I always think of the opening stanza in No. ii.—

> 'Old Yew, which graspest at the stones
> That name the under-lying dead,
> Thy fibres net the dreamless head;
> Thy roots are wrapt about the bones.'—

as being a miracle of poignant music and simple power. And what descriptive rhythm there is in the subtle alliterations and harmonies of the stanza—

> 'But, for the unquiet heart and brain,
> A use in measured language lies;
> The sad mechanic exercise,
> Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.'

What pathos and reticence in the last lines of No. vi.—

> 'To her, perpetual maidenhood,
> And unto me, no second friend.'

And the tender address to the ship bearing his friend's body home in No. x.

English poetry again has few stanzas which for calm beauty can compare with—

> ''Tis well ; 'tis something ; we may stand
> Where he in English earth is laid,
> And from his ashes may be made
> The violet of his native land.' (xviii.)

And the famous stanzas—

> 'When Lazarus left his charnel-cave.' (xxxi.)
> 'Oh yet we trust that somehow good.' (liv.)

and the other stanzas of this philosophic debate.

Or again the stanzas—

> 'I past beside the reverend walls
> In which of old I wore the gown.' (lxxxvii.)
> 'You say, but with no touch of scorn.' (xcvi.)
> 'Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky.' (cvi.)

These are the household words—almost to us to-day the commonplaces of Tennyson. And the public is so far right that these, it may be hackneyed, lines are in grace, simplicity, and music amongst the best masterpieces of English lyric.

A question still remains. With all the charm and pathos of these stanzas, with all that unfailing workmanship surpassed perhaps by Milton alone, does *In Memoriam*, even in form, reach the topmost empyrean of lyric to which one or two of our poets have risen. Memory echoes back to our ear a passionate couplet, it may be, of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, a dazzling gem from *Lycidas*, another from Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, another from Wordsworth's *Ode on Immortality*.

Listen to this—

> 'Yet in these thoughts myself almost despairing
> Haply I think on thee—and then my state,
> Like to the lark at break of day arising
> From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate.'

Here is lyrical passion in all its delirium!—

> 'To me, fair Friend, you never can be old.'
>
> 'But thy eternal summer shall not fade.'
>
> 'When to the sessions of sweet silent thought,
> I summon up remembrance of things past.'

All this rings in our ears like the memory of Beethoven's *Adelaïda*, sung by the great *tenore robusto.*

Or again, we think of Milton's *Nativity*—

> 'The trumpet spake not to the armèd throng;
> And kings sat still with awful eye.'

or we recall *Lycidas*—

> 'He must not float upon his watery bier
> Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
> Without the meed of some melodious tear.'

Does *In Memoriam*, with all its 'curious felicity' of phrase, its perfect chiselling, its stately music in the minor key—does it touch the rapture and the magic of these unforgotten chords of supreme poetry? For my own part, I cannot feel that it does, even in such exquisite stanzas as those cited above.

I think again of Shelley's *West Wind*—

> 'O thou
> Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
> The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
> Each like a corpse within its grave, until
> Thine azure sister of the spring shall blow
> Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth.'

Here is the Muse of Hellas who inspired the *ἔπεα πτερόεντα* of Pindar and of Sappho.

And again I think of Wordsworth's *Ode*—

> 'There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
> The earth, and every common sight,
> To me did seem
> Apparelled in celestial light,
> The glory and the freshness of a dream.'

and so on down to—

> 'To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.'

It is true that the stanzas of *In Memoriam* are more ingenious, more delicately chiselled, more subtle in art, than these Wordsworthian truisms; but they do not altogether rouse one with such a ring; they do not ravish the soul and stamp the memory so deeply; they are not quite so spontaneous, so unaffected, so inimitable; and therefore I feel that they fail to mount into the topmost air of poetic rapture.

But saying this, we do not diminish the laureate's crown. *In Memoriam* must long remain one of our noblest poems, along with Gray's *Elegy*, also a little academic—a poem, it must be allowed, too long and in places rather too obvious, if not trivial. *In Memoriam* will stand along with Coleridge's *Ode to Love*, Keats' *Ode to Autumn*, Marvell's *Odes and Elegies*—superior perhaps to all of these as it is, but still wanting in that amplest breath of the Delphic God. Indeed, with all its art, melody, and charm, we see from time to time in *In Memoriam* a little too visibly 'the sad mechanic exercise,' which is the inevitable result of too rigid and prolonged devotion to the uses of 'measured language.' To Chaucer, to Shakespeare, to Spenser—nay, to Shelley and Burns, to Byron and Keats, poetry never could be for an hour a mechanic exercise. They all, like Shelley's *Skylark*, would pour their 'full heart in profuse strains of unpremeditated art.'

THEOLOGY

So far we have been considering the lyrical form of *In Memoriam*—a form which, if never quite reaching

in rapture the supreme bursts of lyric, is after Milton's the most faultlessly chiselled verse in our language. We pass to its substance: and we will say at once that in conception it is not equal to its form. Yet in conception it is a noble poem. The account of its origin and its long and gradual construction in detached elegies extending over sixteen years, as explained in Hallam Tennyson's valuable *Memoir*, fully disposes of the adverse criticisms that were once passed on the scheme of the poem. The sudden death of Arthur Hallam, and his wonderful promise, gifts, influence and so forth, form the occasion, the overture, the *motive* of *In Memoriam*; but these things do not at all form the main substance of the whole. The early death of Edward King was the occasion of *Lycidas*; but we do not hold Milton literally bound to his belief that his young friend had left no peer on earth. Nor do we take every phrase in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* or Byron's *Childe Harold* as absolute autobiography and not poetry.

As the poet himself tells us, *In Memoriam* is a *Divina Commedia*, a meditative poem, wherein thoughts on death, man's destiny, future life, and the purposes of the Creator, gradually lead up to Faith in His goodness, and a sober sense of happiness in Resignation and Love. This makes it a real *Divina Commedia*—a bona-fide effort to 'assert eternal Providence and justify the ways of God to men.' But then *In Memoriam* is a *Divine Comedy*, or a *Paradise Lost, longo intervallo.* Putting aside the fact that Tennyson is not a Dante or a Milton, and that his graceful elegies do not pretend to vie with the mighty imagination of these immortal visions, can it be said that either the theology or the philosophy of *In Memoriam* are new, original, with an independent force and depth of their own? Surely

not. They are exquisitely graceful re-statements of the current theology of the broad-Churchman of the school of F. D. Maurice and Jowett—a combination of Maurice's somewhat illogical piety with Jowett's philosophy of mystification. As the Darwinian and evolutionary theories discussed are not the original discoveries of the poet in natural science, so the theological and metaphysical problems are not original contributions to theology or philosophy. They are an admirably tuneful versification of ideas current in the religious and learned world.

Opinions on the poetical value of Tennyson's theology as a poet may be formed by any serious mind, apart from private convictions on the theology itself. Auguste Comte expressed unbounded admiration for the *Divine Comedy* and the *Paradise Lost*, as he did for Thomas à Kempis and Bossuet. So every one of fair mind would rejoice to recognise intellectual grasp, fused by poetic imagination, in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, if he could find in it central ideas treated with native power and new insight. A materialist of feeling can enter heartily into the profound power of *Job*, of the *City of God*, of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, of Bossuet's *Universal History*, little as he believes any dogmas they contain. But does *In Memoriam* teach anything, or transfigure any idea which was not about that time common form with F. D. Maurice, with Jowett, C. Kingsley, F. Robertson, Stopford Brooke, Mr. Ruskin and the Duke of Argyll, Bishops Westcott and Boyd Carpenter? It is true that Tennyson clothes with exquisite form, and presents almost as so much original thought, the ideas which in 1850 were floating about in the mental atmosphere of Oxford and Cambridge men; he had common ground with the liberal

clergy of that date; and also he was in touch with many general ideas of Herschel, Owen, Huxley, Darwin, and Tyndall.

He embodied these discussions, theories, and pious hopes of broad-Churchmen in lovely phrases; but he has in no sense added to them, nor did he give them new power. He did nothing to make a Theodicee of his own, as Dante did of the Catholic creed, and as Milton did of the Puritan creed. Nothing of the kind. *In Memoriam*, with all its devotional mysticism, contains no solid thought that we do not find in F. Robertson's *Sermons*, in Jowett's *Essays*, in Dr. Martineau's philosophy, and we may now add, in Arthur Balfour's *Philosophic Doubts* and *Foundations of Belief*. (Heaven save the mark!)—

> 'Our little systems have their day.'
> 'We have but faith: we cannot know.'

and much to that effect. Well, but we need to know a little more; and Tennyson only again, for the thousandth time, re-echoes most musically our sense of ignorance. For a century, ten thousand pulpits have been echoing the same cry, as have hundreds of beautiful essays full of pious hopes, and vague moanings about something 'behind the veil.' Popes, Caliphs, martyrs, mystics, Bunyan, Swedenborg, and many more have their ideas about what we shall find 'behind the veil.' But we get no further.

Together with *In Memoriam*—what was indeed the prelude, almost the first rough sketch of *In Memoriam*, equal to it in metrical skill and also in meditative power—we must take the *Two Voices*. It might well be urged that the *Two Voices*, in the astonishing art with which its most exacting stanza is managed, in

the mastery in which a subtle argument is embodied in terse poetic form, in its richness of metaphysical suggestion, forms the greatest triumph of Tennyson's profounder poems. Our language has few finer examples of argumentative verse. But has the argument the stamp of original genius, of new and pregnant thought? Surely not. The ideas are those which have been worked out in a hundred sermons and essays by able men who, feeling the force of many unsolved problems of metaphysics and of science, still would find æsthetic, moral, and psychological grounds for 'faintly trusting the larger hope.' Nor can it be denied that throughout this poem, as throughout *In Memoriam*—as in all the metaphysical poems—there runs the undertone of scepticism, of absence at any rate of entire mental assurance and solid *belief*, as distinct from *hope*—

'A hidden hope, the voice replied.'
'To feel, although no tongue can prove.'
'Believing, where we cannot prove.'
'We have but faith; we cannot know.'
'An infant crying in the night,
And with no language but a cry.'
'Behind the veil, behind the veil.'
'There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds!'

No one can deny that all this is exquisitely beautiful; that these eternal problems have never been clad in such inimitable grace. Nor do we doubt that they embody a train of thought very rife in the cultured intellect of our time. But the train of thought is essentially that with which ordinary English readers had been made familiar by F. D. Maurice, Professor

Jowett, Dr. Martineau, *Ecce Homo*, *Hypatia*, and now by Arthur Balfour, Mr. Drummond, and many valiant companies of *Septem Contra Diabolum*. The argument in substance is, that as Science is still unable to explain the Universe, and as Metaphysics still nurse their abysmal problems, we should faintly trust the larger hope. Orthodox Churchmen say this larger hope is to be found in the Anglican Prayer Book; orthodox Methodists say it is only to be read in the Bible; Catholics say it is in the living voice of the Church; broad-Churchmen find it in various beautiful and somewhat nebulous visions; but of all believers in the Gospel, they hold to it most 'faintly' and with the largest mixture of perplexity and hesitation. No form of the 'larger hope' admits more readily of poetic expression than does this. And Tennyson, in many thousand lines, has given it a shape supremely typical of nineteenth-century culture. But he caught up, he did not create, the ideas; and his most melodious transfiguration of this half-sceptical piety does not give him any title as philosophic genius, nor as the living inspiration on the higher problems of our age. He gave it a voice, he did not give it a faith.

In later years the polemical tone of mind rather grew on him, and he wrote several pieces, the substantial argument of which did not rise above the level of the popular sermons, essays, and novels which confute modern philosophy and science. Pamphleteering, even in defence of the Christian verities—much less in advocacy of the 'hidden hope' or 'honest doubt'—is seldom poetry, and the manifest inferiority of these later pieces is proof that the poet was on a wrong scent. Such queer things as that called *Despair*, with its elephantine lines of sixteen syllables, belong to

the large group of theological burlesques whereof the *Mighty Atom* presents the most absurd type. Another such piece is the oddity called *Vastness*, with its twenty-syllable lines, in the manner of Walt Whitman, but hardly so rhythmical as his *Leaves of Grass*. Lovers of Tennyson's poetry can only regret these controversial pieces which betray a rather shallow irritability of religious spirit, and form a blot on his otherwise true poetic judgment.

But though Tennyson did at last deviate into utterly unpoetical sermonising, though his great meditative poems followed, rather than created, the current ideas of his time, he amply deserved the immense influence he possessed over the higher religious world. It may be needful now to remind his less reasonable admirers that the poetic expression of current ideas does not fulfil the highest function of the poet. Burns distinctly created the deep enthusiasm of all true Scots for their race in all types of its simple manliness. Wordsworth created the passion of modern Englishmen for communion with Nature. Byron filled Europe with sympathy for historic Rome and Greece. We cannot claim for Tennyson any such creative influence over men. He did for the religious thought of English Christians in far grander verse, as it was a far nobler type of religious thought, what Young did in his *Night Thoughts* for the religious thought of the last century. From the philosophic point of view, *In Memoriam* is a kind of glorified *Christian Year*. It has made Tennyson the idol of the Anglican clergyman—the world in which he was born and the world in which his whole life was ideally past—the idol of all cultured youth and of all æsthetic women. It is an honourable post to fill. He was in all things a true and illus-

trious poet. Only, his devotees must remember that he does not reach the rank of Shakespeare, of Milton, of Chaucer, of Spenser—nay, it may be doubted if his ultimate place in our literature will at all overtop that of Burns, Wordsworth, Byron, or Shelley; men who, with all their defects and all their limitations, did, by original ideas fresh from their own spirit and not at all adapted from contemporary thinkers, give a new impulse to the mind of their age.

'THE IDYLLS'

Hitherto we have considered Tennyson's religious and philosophical pieces (especially *In Memoriam*, the most perfect of his poems), because his claim to rank as the supreme poet of the nineteenth century must rest on this if on anything. That he is the supreme poet of the Victorian era is too clear for question. The chief poems after *In Memoriam* are the *Idylls of the King*, occupying more than one-fourth of the entire collection of *Poems*; *The Princess*, filling about one-twelfth of the collected *Works*; and *Maud*, not half *The Princess* in length. The *Idylls of the King* are the best known and most read of the larger poems, and in some points of view are the most important of all Tennyson's works, inasmuch as they are far the largest, and covered in execution nearly forty years of the poet's life. The twelve books, of over 11,000 lines, are in form an epic; they display nearly all the poet's great qualities in turn, except the didactic and the purely lyrical. They are a wonderful monument of sustained and chastened fancy, of noble ideals, and of delicious music.

A volume would not suffice to dilate on all the

beauties of the *Idylls*, the romantic halo of chivalry, the glow of colour, the sonorous clang of the battle scenes, the tender pathos of the love scenes, the tragedy of the catastrophe, the final threnody, when 'on the mere the wailing died away.' A volume would not suffice to expatiate on all these graces; and for every lover of poetry, for every reader of taste, such a volume, or even such an essay, is wholly needless.

A far more difficult task is to class these fascinating poems. To what order of poetry do they belong; do they fulfil all their aim; are they an unqualified success? Clearly the *Idylls* do not form a real epic. There is too much pure fancy, too much sentiment, too much of the drawing-room and the lecture-hall—in a word, it is nearer to a modern romance than to an antique epic. It is poetry, exquisite poetry, but no more an epic than Shelley's *Revolt of Islam* is an epic, or than his *Hellas* is a tragedy. The words in which Shelley describes his purpose in the *Revolt of Islam* curiously fit the *Idylls of the King*. 'I have sought to enlist the harmony of metrical language, the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle transitions of human passion, all those elements which essentially compose a poem, in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality.' That is a perfectly legitimate motive of a poem. And in a certain degree this is what Tennyson has done in his *Idylls*, making his plot infinitely more real, more intelligible, and more interesting than that of Shelley s *Islam*.

In choosing as his theme a well-known romance, adapting and developing a very grand old prose-poem, Tennyson obtained the great advantage of incidents living, thrilling, and even familiar, and thus avoiding the cloudy symbolism of Shelley's scheme, which makes

Islam a closed book to the ordinary public. But then Tennyson fell on the other horn of the dilemma, which was the risk of travestying the old romance, so that it became more or less incongruous, unnatural, and impossible. Lovers of exquisite verse and of romantic chivalry, who know nothing either of historic chivalry or of the mediæval romances, do not feel the incongruity; and they form the great majority of the Tennysonian public. But from the point of view of actual history and the real Arthurian myth, the filling the old bottle of Malory with the new wine of Alfred Tennyson is an inevitable danger. Lancelot of the Lake is transformed into a sort of Sir Charles Grandison in plate armour; King Arthur becomes a courtier's portrait of the late Prince Consort. Elaine is a new Virginie without her 'Paul,' and Queen Guinevere is a magnificent 'grande dame' of Versailles, with a secret. It is all too much of a pageant or 'revival' in mediæval character, and suggests reminiscences of the Eglinton Tournament and the stage Shakespeare.

We all feel the wonderful skill with which the local colour is maintained, the glamour of antique setting, the tone of mingled chivalry and barbaric rage in the warriors of the Dragon and of the White Horse. But this very realism of painting increases the incongruity of the whole. These Berserker blood-feasts, these eternal jousts and pageants, these murderous conspiracies and feuds, will not assimilate with the Grand Monarque courtliness of King Arthur, the Quixotic heroisms and sublimated amours of Lancelot, the unearthly passion of the love-lorn maid of Astolat. If the whole poem were cast in a purely ideal world, we could accept it as pure fantasy. But it is not quite an ideal world. Therein lies the difficulty. The scene,

though not of course historic, has certain historic suggestions and characters. It is a world far more real than that of Spenser's *Faery Queen*, or Malory's *Morte Darthur*, or Coleridge's *Christabel*. So far as concerns the scene, and the external surroundings, the costumes and the landscapes, we feel these to be a plausible field for a chivalric romance—full of fancy and of poetry, no doubt, but still plausible, intelligible, and coherent. Various episodes, combats, and actions take place upon this scene, of a kind consistent with it, and poetically natural to romances of chivalry. Whole books read almost like incidents we might find in Joinville or Froissart done into exquisite poetry.

But then, in the midst of so much realism, the knights, from Arthur downwards, talk and act in ways with which we are familiar in modern ethical and psychological novels; but which are as impossible in real mediæval knights as a Bengal tiger or a Polar bear would be in a drawing-room. The women, from the Queen to Elaine and Enid, behave, not like dames and damsels of mediæval romance, but with the spiritual delicacy and all the soul-bewildering casuistry we study and enjoy in *Hypatia*, *Romola*, *Middlemarch*, or *Helbeck of Bannisdale*. The *Idylls of the King* are an amalgam of mediæval romance and analytical novel. Both mediæval romance and analytical novel may be made full of interest and power. But the attempt to fuse them into one poem is beyond the art of any imagination.

A still greater difficulty beset the poet in his Arthurian epic, in the fact that he does not invent his plot and his characters as Milton, Spenser, and Shelley do in their dream-worlds; but he has simply modernised and bowdlerised a noble old epic which needs no

decoration from us. Malory's *Morte Darthur* is a grand poem itself; consistent as a whole, intelligible, and natural as a mediæval romance. Crammed with wild incident, as is Malory's epic—with witchcraft, magic and miracle, blood and battle, lust and rape, villainy and treason—knights and dames behave accordingly. They love, fight, slay, rob, joust, and do deeds of 'derring-do,' and of true love, legal or illegal, like hot-blooded men and women in fierce times, before an idea had arisen in the world of 'reverencing conscience,' of 'leading sweet lives,' of 'keeping down the base in man,' 'teaching high thought,' with 'amiable words and courtliness,' and so forth. Malory's original *Morte Darthur* is plausible as a mediæval romance, with all its devilry and angelry, its infinite transformation scenes and supernaturalisms, its fierce loves and hates, its blood and crime, and with all its fantastic ideals of 'Honour' and of 'Love.' But in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, the devils and most of the angels disappear, the supernaturalism shrinks to a few incidents; there is a good deal of fighting, but the knights are almost too polite to kill each other; if the ladies do commit *faux pas*, their artifices and compunctions are those of the novel or the stage. And so the whole fierce, lusty epic gets emasculated into a moral lesson, as if it were to be performed in a drawing-room by an academy of young ladies.

No one could complain of using the elements of a poem, as Shelley says, 'in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality.' But the lovers of Malory do complain of having his rough-hewn romance modernised and bowdlerised into an incongruous medley. It is not fair to the old romancer, and the result is an hermaphrodite kind of work, in spite of all the winning

gracefulness which is the peculiarity of such decadent art. The Nibelungen Epic presents to us a mass of tragic horror which suits the fierce war-song it is, and the mythical age in which it is cast. But we should not care to have Siegfried transmuted into a model prince with serious ideas about the social question, Chrimhild and Brunhild become stately royal ladies with a past, and Hagen and Folker exchanging moral sentiments over the corpse of King Gunther. Mr. Pope translated the *Iliad* into Queen Anne heroics, but happily he did not attempt a paraphrase of it in the manner of the *Rape of the Lock*. The *Idylls of the King* are a delicious series of poetic tableaux; and would be pure poetry, if we could forget the incongruity of making belted knights with fairy mothers talking modern morality—noble and musical as the morality is—and if we could forget the fierce clang of battle, and all the rude and unholy adventures that Malory rehearsed once for all in his inimitable mother-tongue.

So far it seemed necessary to face the weaker side of the *Idylls of the King*, because in the conspiracy of silence into which Tennyson's just fame has hypnotised the critics, it is bare honesty to admit defects. And the frank statement of these is forced upon judicious lovers of the laureate's work by the extravagant tone of some of his admirers. Gushing curates and æsthetic young ladies have been heard to talk as if the *Idylls of the King* formed a far grander poem than Spenser's *Faery Queen*, or Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, nay, stood on a level with the *Paradise Lost*. But when the incongruity of his plan and the anomalies of his characters are once frankly admitted, we can all join in acclaiming the splendour of the execution of Tenny-

son's largest poem. *Elaine*, *Guinevere*, and the *Passing of Arthur*, in particular, contain poetry as exquisite in picture, in music, in pathos, as any in our language. The speeches of Arthur, of Lancelot, of Pelleas, and of many more, are truly noble, eloquent, and epic in themselves, if we forget for a moment the acts and the other conditions of these heroes in the rest of the poem. The final parting of Arthur and Guinevere, undoubtedly the most dramatic and heroic scene Tennyson ever painted, is a grand conception, if detached from the Round Table story, and if treated simply as a modern (or undated) episode between false wife and magnanimous husband in his agony of shame, wrath, and sorrow.

If the poet had been bidden by some royal taskmaster to perform the unnatural task of converting episodes from the Arthurian cycle into poems fit for the young person of modern culture, it could not have been accomplished with more consummate beauty and faultless delicacy. And in this connection it is significant that the better judgment gives the chief crown of poetry in the whole collection to the original *Morte d'Arthur*, beginning—

'So all day long the noise of battle rolled,'

and ending—

'And on the mere the wailing died away.'

These noble lines, the most perfect in form and the simplest in conception of the *Idylls*, were written in early youth, and are an amazing triumph of precocious art. In them we have an ideal of mystical kinghood and a world of pure fancy, wonder, and weird myth, undisturbed by any incongruous tale of Arthur's blindness and Guinevere's falseness. One used to hear it

said at Oxford in the fifties, that if the *Morte d'Arthur* of the early *Poems* was ever completed, it would be the grandest epic in our language. Alas! this was not to be fulfilled. It still remains the only fragment of real epic in the *Idylls*; the only fragment, because simple, unalloyed with incongruous plot, untainted with modern romance, without ethical or psychological subtleties and graces.

'THE PRINCESS' AND 'MAUD'

As *In Memoriam* is certainly the most perfect of Tennyson's longer poems, and as the *Idylls of the King* form the most important part of his work, by the scale, variety, and elaboration of the whole series, so we must count *The Princess* and *Maud* as his most characteristic and typical achievements. *The Princess* was published in 1847, when the poet was thirty-eight; *Maud* in 1855, when he was forty-six. In *The Princess* Tennyson chose a subject in which all his genius found full play, which was entirely within all his resources. It was far lighter in design, much better fitted for his wonderful gifts of sweetness and grace, than the wild legends of the Arthurian cycle. It was no epic—not even an 'epyll,' or cross, we may say, between the epic and idyll. It was, as it was entitled, a 'Medley.' It was a fantastic idyllic romance, with a gentle undertone of moral purpose, not without a great deal of modern 'sentiment,' and some graceful and ladylike banter. Here was a subject which was curiously in harmony with the poet's temperament and exquisite refinement. He was not called upon to build up an epic, or even an episode in an epic—a thing for which he had (possibly knew that he had) no real mission. But the fantastic

romance, cast in an undefined ideal world, and interfused with an ethical evangel—an idyll of chivalry told to a bevy of young ladies in a drawing-room, with an eye to their moral improvement—here was a field in which Tennyson had no superior or equal. It may not have been the highest field of a great poet's aspiration, but, in its own line, the poem is a bewitching success. The result is a piece of unbounded popularity, the charms of which satisfy the most scrupulous criticism as completely as they enthral the whole reading public.

Maud is, in some ways, the most original of all Tennyson's conceptions. It is the first of those he chose for reading to his friends. It contains the most complex and subtle plot of any of the pieces which he constructed for himself. As an elaborate psychological analysis, he never produced anything on such a scale. The method of its composition—from the catastrophe back to the origin—as it is explained in the *Memoir*, is very singular and characteristic. The poem certainly contains the poet's most subtle insight into the human heart and brain. It contains also some of his most stirring eloquence, his fiercest passion, and undoubtedly much of his most entrancing melodies. The contrast between the dark mysteries of its opening—'the dreadful hollow,' 'dabbled with blood-red heath,' 'the ghastly pit,' 'the red-ribbed ledges drip with a silent horror of blood'—and then the passing to the 'Birds in the high Hall-garden,' 'go not, happy day,' and so on to the miraculous music of 'Come into the garden, Maud'—this contrast is profoundly impressive.

But with all the originality of *Maud* as a psychologic study, and all its luscious music, it is not a complete success. We must agree with Ruskin's complaint, amidst all his admiration, that he did not

quite like the 'sad story' and the 'wild kind of versification.' The story is more than sad: it is painful, it is ghastly, without being quite tragic. It is never pleasant to hear one recounting the phases of his own mania. And the wildly Bacchantic prosody of the strophes, though often beautiful, and always skilful, produces the effect of a *pot pourri* in a poem of such length—some 1500 lines. But there is a more serious criticism to be made. The story is a psychologic romance, more fit for prose than for verse. In poetry it is rather too analytic, complex, and introspective for entire enjoyment and ready comprehension. And the romance itself is gruesome and somewhat revolting, as a basis for so much fancy and such delicate melodies. It is slightly incongruous, as if the story of Eugene Aram were set to music for the flute. Subtle mysteries of crime and lunacy are endurable in an analytic novel, but do not tell well or even intelligibly in dulcet lyrics. Tens of thousands of men and women imagine themselves to love *Maud* as a poem, with very faint understanding of its mysterious plot and its morbid psychology.

Tennyson hardly ever wrote without a moral purpose of some kind. But his attempt to weave into a ghastly story of crime, avarice, and insanity a fervid hymn to the moral value of national War, was, to say the least, a little irrelevant. It may have been right to denounce the Manchester school of politicians and to glorify the Crimean War as an Ethical Crusade in defence of the 'higher life,' but it prevented many worthy people from doing justice to the beauties of the poem. They would have thought it poisonous rant to preach, that the only way to cure the sin and fraud of great cities was to embark in a big war, were it not that they found this remarkable evangel of the nineteenth

century after Christ put into the mouth of a somewhat crazy 'degenerate,' with memories of a blurred and bloody past.

LYRICS AND IDYLLS

It is a far happier task to turn to the more distinctly lyrical work of Tennyson—that whereon his permanent fame must abide. From the early *Claribel* to the final *Crossing the Bar*, separated by some sixty years of production, Tennyson's pure lyrics stand in the front rank of English lyrical achievement. It is needless to dilate on what every one has admired—man, woman, and child ; scholar, simple, critic, or general public. Nor has the praise and delight in this exquisite music been excessive or mistaken. It is a field where the student of Sappho and Catullus join hands with the girl in the schoolroom in unbounded admiration. The marvel is that these songs, with their luscious melody, their Æolic chiselling of phrase, their simple completeness, were the work of so young a poet, came forth full-fledged from the egg. That such pieces as *Mariana*, *Oriana*, *Fatima*, the *Merman and Mermaid*, should be thrown off by an unknown youth is amazing. That such a genius for melody should have been retained to the age of eighty, and produce in old age songs like *The Throstle* and *Early Spring*, is almost more amazing. The wealth as well as the beauty of Tennyson's lyrical productions places him in the foremost rank of our lyrists—strong as our literature has been for many centuries in that form of poetry.

The unanimous voice of the public has been right in fastening on the best of these lyrics, so that they have become household words, as familiar as those of Milton

or Burns. *The Miller's Daughter*, *The Lotos-Eaters*, *Break*, *break*, *break*, the *Dream of Fair Women*, *Locksley Hall*, *The Light Brigade*, *The Revenge* are equally popular, and in various modes deserve their immense vogue. Above all others are the songs in *The Brook*, in *The Princess*, and in *Maud*. Of them all, no doubt, the songs in *The Princess* are the most bewitching: 'The splendour falls on castle walls'—'Tears, idle tears'—'O swallow, swallow'—'Now sleeps the crimson petal'—and lastly, 'Come down, O maid,' with its miraculous couplet, 'The moan of doves'—assuredly the most felicitous bit of imitative music in modern poetry, perhaps even in all English poetry.

Even whilst under the spell of these siren chants, we must not suffer ourselves to be drawn into any false raptures. The lyrics, with all their charm, hardly rise to the Olympian radiance of a lyric by Sappho or Sophocles. They do not move us like *Lycidas* or Shakespeare's *Songs*; no! nor like such ballads as the *Twa Corbies* or the *Land o' the Leal*, *John Anderson*, *O Waly Waly*, or *Fair Helen*. They have not that audible ring that we hear in Shelley's *Skylark*, and several others of Shelley's best lyrics. Nor have they that inexplicable pathos of Lovelace's *Althea*, and some Scottish songs of Burns and Scott. The music of Tennyson's loveliest songs is somewhat languorous. It is—

> 'Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,
> Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes.'

Exquisite, exquisite! but a little cloying—the true moan of melancholy lotos-eaters! In all these songs we faint under the dulcet sounds of harp and flute, but we miss the trumpet and bassoon. We miss the lilt of *Scots Wha Hae,* of *A man's a man for a' that*,

the passion of *Duncan Gray*, the indescribable enthralment of the *Ancient Mariner*. No one thinks of putting Tennyson's place in poetry below that of Burns, Scott, or Coleridge. But even in his happiest lyrics, there is some want of the clarion note that they from time to time could sound.

We do not altogether *hear* Tennyson shout forth these verses: we rather *see* him piecing them together, with consummate art, but without that ungovernable tempest of feeling which marks the highest lyric, so that speech seems to fail the poet, and he bursts into unrestrainable song. Tennyson's lyrics are all exquisitely melodious and marvellously worked. But the very melody and the work somewhat lessen our sense of their spontaneous inspiration. And of all forms of poetry, lyric most needs the sense of being inspired song, inevitable outpouring of heart.

The essence of lyric is *feeling*—passion, the thrill of joy, anguish, or strife. No one can dispute the feeling of Tennyson's lyrics; but it is usually clothed in such subtle graces of fancy, in such artful cadences, in such enamelled colouring, that it strikes the imagination more than the heart. We feel this even in such an exquisite ballad as *Edward Gray*; which, with all its pathos, is somewhat too pretty, too artful, too modern. The songs are not quite simple, and the expression of *feeling* must be simple. Burns's songs are in verbal refinement mere peasant's catches as compared with Tennyson's subtle modulations. But they have the thrill which rings through and through us. We *hear* them sung, even as we do in such immortal songs as 'Take, Oh! take those lips away,' or 'Come away, come away, Death!' In Molière's *Misanthrope*, Alceste justly prefers 'J'aime mieux ma mie, O gai!' to the most

ingenious sonnet. That is the supreme charm of Shakespeare's songs—'Full fathom five thy Father lies!' 'Tell me where is Fancy bred!'—a child can follow this; might even utter it. No words could be more natural and easy. And this ring from the heart's chords is in Burns's songs, from 'O, my Luve is like a red, red rose' down to the tipsy fun of 'The Deil cam fiddling through the town.' Scott, who is only a very fine poet in a few songs, has this incommunicable *cantabile*, which Shelley often, Byron and Wordsworth and Keats once or twice, have touched. Tennyson's lyrics, as we all feel, have exquisite music; but it is the music of recitation, of memory, of thought, rather than of song. They are too luscious, too brocaded to be sung. But if they miss this thrill which forces forth the voice, they gain in poetic colour, in complex harmony, in translucence. Thousands of lovers of *The Princess* linger over the melting cadences of the songs therein — 'Tears, idle tears,' 'O swallow, swallow,' 'Now sleeps the crimson petal,' 'Come down, O maid' —without knowing that these lovely lines are composed in heroic blank verse—the same metre as *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes.* They wring us like the *Cujus animam* of Rossini's *Stabat Mater.* But, like that wonderful dirge, they are a little too languorous—have too much *morbidezza* for great art.

But if the songs, with all their 'linked sweetness long drawn out,' with all that 'melting voice through mazes running,' speak to us with the mind rather than the voice, Tennyson has appropriated a form of lyric poem which is peculiarly his own, and in which he is supreme. This is the real idyll of which *Œnone* is the type The *Idylls of the King* are not true idylls. Edmund Lushington wished to call them epylls, or little epics.

They are not epics, because they have not the note of sustained heroism—what Matthew Arnold called 'the grand manner'; they have too much of *genre*, of sentiment, of modern colouring and ethical reflection. On the other hand, they are not idylls, because they have too much action and pure narration, too much of romantic drama, and too much allegory and moral lesson. But *Œnone* is a true idyll—not too long, a single incident of rural simplicity, a beautiful picture of an ideal world presented in romantic setting. It is a romance, based on an Homeric legend, but saturated with modern *ethos*. It is like a delicious Correggio—say, the *Venus, Mars, and Cupid* of the Louvre, with its wonderful *chiaroscuro* and sunlight playing through the leaves over the warm and palpitating flesh. The Venus of Correggio is not in the least Homer's Aphrodite any more than Mars is Ares: they are deities of Olympus as imagined by Renascence fancy. So the *Œnone* of Tennyson is no nymph of the *Iliad*, any more than the evil-hearted Paris is the son of the epical Priam: much less do Herè and Pallas talk like the Queen and Virgin of the Epic. The whole conception is an Hellenic myth in a setting of modern romance. So the idylls of Theocritus, of Virgil, of Tasso, of Shakespeare present to us some tale of antique simplicity with a colouring entirely that of the poet's own. It is a legitimate and exquisite form of art, like the Greek goddesses of Botticelli or Raffaelle. And these true idylls of Tennyson are delightful specimens of its resources and its beauties.

Œnone was a marvellous production of a youth only just of age; and it still remains the most delightful of them all. *Ulysses*, but a few years later, had a deeper and grander strain, if it had fewer fancies and charms.

And *Tithonus*, begun about the same time as *Ulysses*, is hardly inferior in form. It is astonishing that *Tiresias*, *Œnone's Death*, and *Demeter*, separated from the early idylls by some fifty years, should retain as much of the early fire and music; but it must be confessed that, to say the least, they add nothing to our enjoyment of these pieces. *St. Simeon Stylites*, *Lucretius*, *Columbus*, *St. Telemachus*, belong to a rather different order of art. They are dramatic and reflective poems, like Wordsworth's *Laodamia* or *Michael*. Tennyson's pure idylls, of which *Œnone* is the gem, offer every perfection of his art, and are the form of poetry which best suits his genius. If they do not possess the magical simplicity of Theocritus at his highest, they have a dignity and thoughtfulness which place them above such popular and melodious pieces as those left to us by Bion and Moschus.

ROMANCES AND ODES

The mastery of Tennyson over philosophical argument and pictorial harmonies, and the force with which his masterpieces in meditative and in romantic verses haunt the memory, rather lead us to forget two other forms of art in which he is no less excellent. These are, first, the humorous, secondly the tragic. Few of his pieces are more popular than the *Northern Farmer*, and none more entirely deserves its immense vogue. We must say both forms of the *Northern Farmer*, with their insight into the humours of rural boorishness, middle-class meanness, and their astonishing command of dialect. The poet's command over dialect, as shown in *Owd Roa*, the *Spinster's Sweet-arts*, in the *Promise of May*, the *Northern Cobbler*, and again of the Irish

dialect in *To-morrow*, would be enough to establish a reputation. For their local fidelity is as great as their phonetic ingenuity. These dialect poems, together with the amusing experiments in classical metres, are decisive evidence of the extraordinary ease with which Tennyson strikes from his lyre every note at will. And this command over every kind of metre was the result, not only of his natural genius for rhythm, but of close and unceasing study of prosody, as appears from constant anecdotes and judgments recorded in the *Memoir* by his son.

The humour of the *Northern Farmer*, old and new, has created a type as familiar, and as likely to be enduring, as that of Pecksniff or Becky Sharp or Mrs. Poyser. The *Vision of Sin* was an early revelation of this power; and it was shown as a rare but quite visible thread through the whole of his work, from *The Sleeping Beauty* down to *The Foresters*. Those who heard the poet talk with friends well know the strain of robust humour which underlay all his intellect and his taste. Indeed, a countryman, entering into casual talk with him during a stroll, or at an inn, might for the first ten minutes have mistaken the poet for a rather rough-and-ready humourist. And the *Memoir* is full of examples how hearty a gift of humour lay beneath those sombre meditations and subtle modulations which are the familiar type of Tennyson's verse.

Tennyson, it is often said, is not at his best in the ode. Neither of the odes to the Royal Princesses as brides has any particular value beyond an occasional line or phrase; the *Jubilee Ode* is a melancholy failure; and the *Exhibition Odes* are not much of a success. But it is not fair to judge a poet by poems commanded of him as laureate on occasions of state. Homer

would have been flat if Priam had commanded an ode for the wedding of Troilus and Cressida. But there was one ode in a far nobler strain. *The Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* has, to my ears, a note which Tennyson rarely struck—a Doric note of heroic mode, with a breadth and masculine ring of the classical ode of triumph and lament. It is in many things the least Tennysonian of Tennyson's poems. It has his wonderful gift of imitative music, but it is the music of the funeral march as composed by Handel or Beethoven. I remember the ode being recited, when one who had been present at the burial in St. Paul's, having imperfectly heard the recitation, thought it was a recital of the music used at the funeral. The lines, 'Bury the great Duke'—'Let the long long procession go,' and the whole of the three strophes with which the ode opens, are a magnificent re-echoing in words of great funeral music—

> 'And let the mournful martial music blow,
> The last great Englishman is low.'

The whole of these five strophes are worthy of the occasion, and contain lines and couplets which have passed into current use. But the thought with which the sixth opens, the abrupt cry of Nelson from his tomb beneath the dome: 'Who is he that cometh like an honoured guest,' this, I hold, is one of the grandest conceptions in modern poetry. The suddenness of this burst from the spirit of our greatest seaman, who had slumbered in peace for half a century, its directness and its simplicity, reach the highest note of lyric imagination, and the extreme boldness of the idea is fully justified by the answer—

> 'Mighty Seaman, this is he,
> Was great by land as thou by sea.'

This is true poetry, Pindaric, natural, and thrilling, in simple words and devoid of any prettiness of imagery or subtlety of phrase. Tennyson's *Works*—nay, modern poetry have no nobler inspiration.

However alien to his Muse it may be thought, Tennyson from time to time would find themes of passion, horror, and crime, when he matched himself with Shelley, Byron, and Coleridge in their darkest hours. These themes were not altogether akin to his temperament, and at times he wanted sting and realism for such grim work. But from the first he displayed his power in such a poem as *The Sisters*. Of course, this was the early *Sisters*—'We were two daughters of one race'—for, oddly enough, in the collected *Works*, there are two poems of the same title, and the later *Sisters* is not a success at all. *The Sisters* of the early ballad is a grand and stirring piece, in imitation, no doubt, of the *Twa Corbies* or *Helen of Kirkconnell*, and would be fit to be placed beside these wonderful poems, had it been rather simpler, more reticent, with less of visible artifice. But it is a fine example of the tragic ballad. *Fatima*, again, has the true glow of Eastern passion—

> 'O Love, O fire! once he drew
> With one long kiss my whole soul thro'
> My lips, as sunlight drinketh dew.'

It is curious that Tennyson's wonderful ear and subtle modulations occasionally played him false, and betrayed him into a solecism of speech. Not to insist on the false rhyme of 'through' with 'dew,' which involves the mispronunciation of 'dew' as 'do,' or of 'through' as 'threw,' the first of the cited lines involves a fault in prosody, or a mispronunciation of 'fire' as 'fi-er,' a dissyllable. This is really a cockneyism, and

unfortunately it is one into which the poet's fondness for rusticity in speech occasionally led him. Even the exquisite line in *The Lotos-Eaters* is printed in all editions thus—

'Than *tir'd* eyelids upon *tir'd* eyes.'

Here the prosody twice makes *tir'd* a dissyllable, as if it were 'ti-er'd'! This is almost a vulgarism. Of course, the line should be written—

'Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes.'

Thus, however softly the *-ed* is sounded, it would destroy the musical cadence of the verse. It is no doubt rare, but it is certain that Tennyson now and then makes a false rhyme, due to careless or defective enunciation, which in one so hyper-sensitive of words and so correct is singular. The most conspicuous instance of that is *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, where the word *hundred* rhymes first with *blunder'd*, as if it were pronounced *hunderd*, and then with *thunder'd*, *wonder'd*, and *sunder'd*. Yokels, no doubt, do say *hunderd*, but it should not be immortalised in serious poetry.

Tennyson's tragic, or rather melodramatic, romances are not usually so simple, direct, and yet mysterious as this form of poetry demands, to have unqualified success, in spite of their beauty of form. The tragic romance of which the *Twa Corbies* is a perfect type must deal with naked terror, devoid of a single ornament. It must state the prime visible facts with absolute clearness and precision; it must not fill up the story, but leave much in mystery and horror. Tennyson's essays in this most exacting art are somewhat too elaborate, with too many graces, and too

little left obscure. The story is worked out rather too much in detail, and yet is not quite clear. One or other of these defects rather detracts from the value of such pieces as the *Vision of Sin*, *The Victim*, *The Wreck*, *The Flight*, *To-morrow*, and *Forlorn*.

But there is one piece, and that a poem of his latest period, which is a perfect triumph in the style of grisly romance. *Rizpah* has every quality which a poem of the class demands. The theme is entirely natural; dreadful, and yet historically true—indeed, the poem strictly follows recorded facts. These gruesome facts it narrates with entire plainness, simplicity, and vividness. The story of the mother's agony, madness, and frantic clinging to the bones of her felon son—'the bones that had sucked her, the bones that had moved in her side'—is given with wonderful power. Altogether it is as weird and impressive as anything of the kind in our literature. And the passion and delirium of the mother's wail almost reconcile us to the unfortunate metre with sixteen syllables in each line.

METRICAL SYSTEM AND DRAMAS

This curious turn for enormously long lines seemed to grow on Tennyson with age. We all enjoyed the metre of *Locksley Hall* with its prosody of eight trochees, the last *catalectic* or cut short. But this familiar line of 15 syllables is as long as English words can conveniently bear. *Rizpah* is even longer. But *The Wreck* and *Despair* became fatiguing in the mob of syllables without a pause. The first line of *Despair* is—

> 'Is it you that preach'd in the chapel there looking over the sand?'

This is not poetry, with 16 syllables and 52 letters in the line. The first line of *Charity* is—

> 'What am I doing, you say to me, wasting the sweet summer hours?'

The first line of *Kapiolani* is—

> 'When from the terrors of Nature a people have fashion'd and worship a Spirit of Evil.'

Here we have 23 syllables and 68 letters.

The first line of the *Iliad* has 16 syllables and 30 letters. The first line of *Paradise Lost* has 10 syllables and 34 letters. A language like our own, with an abnormal proportion of consonants and unmusical syllables, is peculiarly unfit to endure the piling up of words in lines of verse.

This proneness to metres of preposterous length grew on the poet with age, and became at last a tiresome mannerism. None other of our poets had previously adopted it. But, unluckily, Tennyson set a fashion which in our day has been very prevalent. It is a fault in prosody which no other poetry but ours has committed; and unhappily the English language, by its agglomeration of consonants and its often uncouth syllables, is peculiarly unfitted to submit to such a burden.

Another peculiarity of Tennyson's verse is the excessive use in blank verse of monosyllables. There are passages of the *Idylls of the King* where monosyllabic lines are in the proportion of 1 in 4, and where lines of more than one polysyllable are only in the proportion of 1 in 4. There are whole passages where nothing is admitted but an occasional polysyllable,

and line after line contains only one dissyllable and all the rest are monosyllables.

Take the very fine passage in the death-wound of King Arthur, *The Passing of Arthur*, about line 150—

> 'Then spake the king: "My house hath been my doom.
> But call not thou this traitor of my house
> Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.
> My house are rather they who sware my vows,
> Yea, even while they brake them, own'd me king.
> And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,
> When all the purport of my throne hath fail'd,
> That quick or dead thou holdest me for king.
> King am I, whatsoever be their cry;
> And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see
> Yet, ere I pass." And uttering this the king
> Made at the man; then Modred smote his liege
> Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
> Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,
> Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,
> Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.'

Here are sixteen lines. Out of these, twelve lines consist of monosyllables or of monosyllables with one single dissyllable. One other line has the weak polysyllable 'whatsoever.' Only three lines out of the sixteen have more than one polysyllable. This of course is measuring by prosody, which makes 'uttering' a trochee (– ◡). Two of the three lines with more than one polysyllable contain proper names. In the sixteen lines there are 130 monosyllables and only 17 polysyllables, including the proper names.

No one can deny that these are noble lines, nor that the use of Biblical monosyllables gives strength and solemnity to the verse. But when it grows into a studied system, it becomes a mannerism, almost an affectation. It is true that Milton carried to excess

the use of polysyllables. But how magnificent is the roll of those majestic heroics—

> 'Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world, and all our woe
> With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
> Restore us, and regain the blissful seat.'

and so on down to—

> 'That to the height of this great argument
> I may assert eternal providence,
> And justify the ways of God to men.'

In the first hundred lines of *Paradise Lost* there are only four lines of pure monosyllables, and only twenty-one lines with a single polysyllable. That is to say, whilst four-fifths of Milton's lines consist of more than one polysyllable, only one-fifth of Tennyson's are so constructed. Milton very rarely resorts to lines consisting solely of monosyllables, though he knows how to use such prosody with grand effect, as in—

> 'Nor the deep tract of hell, say first what cause.'
> 'If thou beest he ; but oh, how fallen ! how chang'd.'

In that most magnificent prelude to the third book of *Paradise Lost*, the first hundred lines contain only four consisting of monosyllables ; and the passage, one of the very grandest in the whole range of English poetry, contains a succession of lines rich in sonorous polysyllables—

> 'Hail, Holy Light, offspring of heav'n first-born,
> Or of the Eternal Coeternal beam,
> May I express thee unblam'd ? Since God is light,
> And never but in unapproached light
> Dwelt from eternity ; dwell then in thee,
> Bright effluence of bright essence increate.'

In these six magnificent lines, all but one have each more than one polysyllable, and the exception has a word of four syllables.

Such, too, is Shakespeare's practice, fond as he is of powerful monosyllabic lines. For instance, take the great speech of Mark Antony in *Julius Caesar*—

> 'O pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth.'

Here, in twenty-two lines, there is not a single monosyllabic line.

Compare Wordsworth's scheme of metre. Take the *Lines written above Tintern Abbey*. In the first hundred and ten lines of this glorious poem, there are but two consisting of mere monosyllables, and the sonorous polysyllables are thrown broadcast through the whole poem—

> 'His little, nameless, unremembered acts.'
>
> 'The still, sad music of humanity.'
>
> 'Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns.'
>
> 'A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought.'

Compare Coleridge's scheme of prosody. In his noble *Hymn in the Vale of Chamouny* (eighty-four lines) there are but three of simple monosyllables, and some of the grandest lines are composed of polysyllables—

> 'Thy habitation from eternity!'
>
> 'I worshipped the Invisible alone.'
>
> 'Who sank thy sunless pillars deep in Earth?
> Who filled thy countenance with rosy light?
> Who made thee parent of perpetual streams?'
>
> 'Earth, with her thousand voices, praises God.'

A careful comparison of Tennyson's blank verse with that of other great masters will show that he made it a deliberate system to resort to monosyllables; and although he has certainly left us some lovely examples of lines rich in polysyllables, as a rule he reduced these to a *minimum*, so that monosyllabic lines at last became a mannerism. No man with an ear for poetry will deny the power and dignity of the monosyllabic line in the hands of a master. But when we feel that this had become a conscious or instinctive habit, and we have hundreds of lines in succession with reiterated monosyllables, whilst a trisyllable or a quadrisyllable is admitted as a rare licence, the inevitable result is monotony. We feel the simple force of such lines as—

> 'Gone thro' my sin to slay and to be slain.'
>
> 'Then rose the king and moved his host by night.'

But there is an effect of *staccato*, as musicians call it, and we feel a richer melody in Wordsworth's—

> 'The still, sad music of humanity.'

or these of Milton—

> 'Won from the void and formless infinite.'
>
> 'Thrones, dominations, princedoms, virtues, Pow'rs!'
>
> 'These are thy glorious works, Parent of good,
> Almighty, thine this universal frame.'

In all the tens of thousands of Tennyson's lines of blank verse, he never once sounded this organ-note.

A wonderful fact in Tennyson's career as a poet was the prolonged period of his productive power. It extended over no less than sixty-seven years (1827-1894), if we count in the last emendations of the

revised *Works*, or to sixty-five years, if we limit it from the earliest to the latest poems. A period so great is almost without example, for it exceeds that of Wordsworth and of Victor Hugo. But, as so often happens with poetic products, the power of the later does not equal that of the earlier inspiration. If we divide the period of Tennyson's poetic activity into two halves, it is obvious that the first half—say, from 1830 to 1860—contains his most important and permanent work. Within this period fall the most familiar *Lyrics*, *The Princess* (1847), *In Memoriam* (1850), *Ode on the Duke of Wellington* (1852), *Maud* (1855), *Idylls of the King* (first series, 1859). We cannot count the later *Idylls*, the continuation poems, and the later *Ballads*, as having the power or the vitality of the great typical triumphs of the poet. At the publication of the first *Idylls of the King* (1859), Tennyson was fifty years old, and he had reached his zenith.

For this reason, it is not necessary to discuss the *Dramas*. They were all published at a late period of life; and their most salient quality is that they were the work of the poet's old age. *Queen Mary*, the earliest of them, was published in 1875, when the poet was in his sixty-sixth year; *Becket*, the most successful of them, was printed (but not published) in 1879; and *The Foresters* was not produced until 1892, when the poet was in his eighty-third year. The four English historical dramas are all finely studied and worked out with that mastery of poetic form and that dignity of conception which Tennyson brought to all his work. They will always have great interest for the students of English literature, and for the lovers of our laureate's art. In an age which had more taste for the higher

drama, and less passion for prurient melodrama, they might be seen on the stage more often than they are. Some day it is possible that *Becket*, as an historical drama, and *The Foresters*, as a scenic operetta, may be adapted by a modern playwright, and heard with pleasure by a cultivated audience. But the seven dramas, taken as a whole, add nothing to the enduring place in our poetic roll which Tennyson will hold; nor would it increase the honour we pay to his genius, were we to discuss the dramas in detail, or insist on their public performance.

PLACE IN ENGLISH POETRY

It is not reasonable, nor is it fair, to compare Tennyson with Milton; and it is not reasonable to compare Tennyson with any poet whatever. We leave it to undergraduates, all agog about their honours, to concoct class-lists of the poets, and to give marks: from Shakespeare with a *maximum*, or 'highest possible,' down to the laureate of the day. Those who love poetry love all fine poets in turn. And Tennyson is a fine poet. His great gift is in lyric, in exquisite melody, in chastened perfection of phrase, in pathetic reflection and a certain metaphysical musing. Viewing his work as a whole, his most ardent admirers feel that in him form dominates the imagination; his fancy is even greater than his originality; he is more the artist than the thinker. No man can be a poet at all without fine form, nor without fancy; and unless he be the artist first, he cannot be poet. But for all this, imagination, originality, intellect—all in supreme degree—are the essence of the poet of the first order.

The paramount influence of Tennyson, like that of

Homer in the old world, of Raffaelle in painting, of Pope in the verse, and Johnson in the prose of the last century, has no doubt exerted a somewhat weakening influence over his immediate contemporaries. The conspicuous and surpassing quality of Tennyson was his dainty felicity of phrase, his faultless chiselling, and his imperturbable refinement. Now these are just the qualities which an age of literary culture, specially trained in the study of language, found most readily imitable, and men fell to imitating it with all the zeal that a scholar feels in imitating Virgil and Ovid. The result was that hundreds of men and women took to inditing, and most of them to publishing, Tennysonian lyrics and idylls, quite as much like *In Memoriam*, *Maud*, and *Œnone* as college exercises are like the *Georgics* and the *Heroides*. Tennyson's overpowering fame and influence spread abroad the idea that poems were made by faultless phrasing, and that conception was a detail. *Poeta nascitur non fit.* But they would have it that fine poems could be concocted by an artful manipulation of the most choice language. And indeed, even in the Master himself, there is at times a suggestion, a reminiscence, of the wonders achieved by the glorified Latin verses of a consummate scholar.

Pocta nascitur, ct fit, was Tennyson's very happy and true epigram. The profoundly interesting *Memoir* by his son (all the more interesting that it is largely the poet's own autobiography, together with anecdotes and reminiscences collected by his family and friends) shows us at every step how laborious a student of the *arcana* of all forms of poetry was Tennyson, and also how unerring was his own judgment about his work and that of others. Nothing that could tend to perfect poetic expression did Tennyson neglect or undervalue.

Of all the pieces which are now given to the public for the first time in the *Memoir*, as having been omitted or condemned by the poet, there is not one of which his judicious lovers will regret the omission from the collected *Works*. Few poets have been quite good judges of their own work, but Tennyson seemed to have an unerring critical faculty. No doubt his impeccable taste, his faultlessness, somewhat detract from his greatness as a poet. Andrea del Sarto was called the *maestro senza errore*. And we feel that, with all his charm, Andrea at times becomes almost cloying with his serene perfection, his unfailing *dolcezza*. Tennyson, too, is the *maestro senza errore*. He is almost too faultless, too completely master of himself, with too refined a taste and too elaborate a training.

Raffaelle and Andrea del Sarto were terrible snares to the academies. Clever students could catch something of their elegance, their correct drawing, their harmony of composition, and it ended in the classicalities of Guido, Poussin, and the Carracci. And it is because the *imitation* of Tennyson is a plausible and prevalent foible of poetic aspirants, that it becomes a duty of serious judges to speak of Tennyson's strength and of his weakness more openly than it has been usual to speak. The academic Osrics of our day, carried away by the almost Virgilian felicity of Tennyson's diction, are too apt to cheapen Byron, Wordsworth, and Shelley, who have all of them committed stuff that is almost bungler's work, if compared with the workmanship of *In Memoriam*. Byron, it is true, would slide into slovenly rhetoric when his bad days came on; he made slips in his grammar, and solecisms of speech which would scandalise a High-school girl; and he hardly ever wrote twenty consecutive verses without a

forced rhyme or some commonplace. Wordsworth was capable of goody-goody drivel and egregious prosing; and, as Matthew Arnold said, the most ardent Wordsworthians are ready to pass by whole pages of poems unremembered and unread. And Shelley, though he was not, as the same critic tells us, 'an ineffectual Angel,' does undoubtedly soar up into transcendental empyreans where we quite lose sight of him, as we do when we watch a balloon mounting into the mists. Tennyson, of course, never descends to vulgarisms, commonplace, or mystification. But for all that, it does not follow that he is a far greater poet than Byron, Shelley, or Wordsworth.

Byron, Shelley, and Wordsworth, each in different ways, stirred and shook men's minds and coloured the whole mental atmosphere of their generation. Byron, with all his weakness and all his evil, was, as Goethe saw, the most imposing personality in English literature of his own generation. Even if we were to admit that he was but a slovenly poet, he was a great genius: a Titan in that union of energy and intellect which imposes ideas on an age and creates new imaginative worlds. The proof is that his influence on other nations has been greater than that of any poet of this century, or even of the last. Byron is one of the very few poets who have wielded a power over the mind of entire Europe; and both Goethe, Scott, Manzoni, and Victor Hugo owed their power to their prose as well as their verse. Whole generations, and many nations which never heard of Tennyson, Wordsworth, or Shelley, are familiar with Byron, and have been influenced by Byron. And it is a paradox to assert that one whose poetry has profoundly influenced modern society is to be denied the name of a true poet, because he often

wrote scrambling and slovenly lines. The essence of poetry is potent and original imagination—the note which dwells on the memory and colours the life of men.

Wordsworth, again, has certainly given a new tone to the thoughts and feelings of Englishmen. Nature wears to us a new aspect, speaks to the heart with a new power, ever since Wordsworth wrote. And Shelley has carried this worship of nature into a kind of pantheism which has influence over minds such as Wordsworth does not wholly satisfy and fill. Since Shelley gave to this century his immortal descants, the lovers of the higher poetry, a faithful few it may be, have had opened to them from the turmoil of this age a new heaven and a new earth.

It would be too much to claim for Tennyson any such European influence as that of Byron, or the creative originality of Wordsworth or Shelley. Byron, Wordsworth, and Shelley were all fired with moral and social ideas which they preached and flung, or even stormed out, to their generation. Right or wrong, wholesome or morbid, these ideas filled them and their poems, and have to some degree moulded the thoughts of men, sometimes even by reaction and repulsion. There is something of the prophet and the reformer about them all; they dealt with the problems of the moral and social life of their age, the political and ethical evangels of an age of storm and change. That they were often wrong-headed, utopian, even mischievous, is true. But their imagination played very largely round the causes, the ideals, the dilemmas which shook society around them, and, in a certain degree, in new forms shake us all to-day. Tennyson did this with far less conviction and with no such power. He

meditated in exquisite cadences about death, futurity, creation, but in a rather hesitating spirit, and with most musical insistence on the 'faith in honest doubt.' But he held aloof in a somewhat detached position from the great social seethings of his age. He lay beside the nectar of his lovely melodies, and his bolts were hurled far below him in the valleys where men moil and fight. Honest doubt and faint trust in the larger hope are often soothing, even soporific and beautiful, but they do not make a new epoch in poetry or thought.

The only national and social causes into which Tennyson ever flung his whole heart were the modern cry of Imperialism and the glorification of British arms. The expansion of empire, Indian and African battues, are sufficiently popular with the public to do without poetic stimulus—*nec carent vate sacro.* They have their own Tyrtæus, whose odes are sung to the accompaniment of a brass band. Such ballads ring most untunefully in the lofty music of English literature, and they enter into unworthy competition with the sensations provided for us by the daily press. It is not of course any question of political differences. A real lover of high poetry, whatever his politics, were he the veriest 'little Englander' or Quaker, can take delight in the martial enthusiasm of Scott, the patriotics of Burns, the war-songs of Campbell—those were indeed times to stir a poet's fire—and he takes delight in Manzoni's *Cinque Maggio*, or in Tennyson's *Ode on the Burial of the Duke of Wellington.* Poetry is its own justification, and is no thing of parties or politics. And all poetry that rises into the upper air of the eternal realities, stands above all controversy, passion, or prejudice.

But when our poet descends into the arena of party polemics, in such things as 'Riflemen, Form,' 'Hands all Round,' 'The Third of February, 1852,' 'The Fleet,' and other topical pieces dear to the Jingo soul, it is not poetry but journalism. And journalists' poetry should be left to such rhymesters as those who, like the Poet Laureate of our empire, and the Poet Laureate of Tommy Atkins, fill the columns of the newspapers when the vulgar are seized with a war-fit or a scare.

But Tennyson, though much of his work is no doubt destined to be shed in the course of time, as is so much of all workers except the very greatest, has stamped his name for ever on English literature as *the* poet, the one dominant poet of the long Victorian era, and as one of the chief lyrists in the whole of our poetic roll. He is destined to share with Milton the crown of consummate mastery of poetic diction. As a poet of nature he stands beside Byron, Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth. Byron is the poet of mountains and oceans, Shelley of clouds and air, Keats of the perfume of the evening, Wordsworth of the meaning and mysteries of nature as a whole. And so Tennyson is the poet of flowers, trees, and birds. Of flowers and trees he must be held to be the supreme master, above all who have written in English, perhaps indeed in any poetry. The meanest flower that blows does not inspire in Tennyson thoughts so deep as it did to Wordsworth, but Tennyson has painted them all—flowers, wild and cultivated, trees, herbs, woods, downs and moors—with the magic of a Turner. He spoke of trees and flowers, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that groweth on the wall. As flowers, hills, trees, and rivers uttered to Wordsworth a new moral Decalogue, so they seemed to Tennyson, as they did to Turner, radiant with a

fanciful beauty which no man had seen before. If we cannot claim for Tennyson the supreme place of a poet of man's destinies, or as one of the creative masters of our literature, he has for ever clothed the softer aspects of the world of man and nature with a garment of delicate fancy and of pure light.

CHAPTER II

RUSKIN AS MASTER OF PROSE

Is it indeed beyond hope that our generation should at last do entire justice to our brightest living genius, the most inspiring soul still extant amongst us, whilst he may yet be seen and heard in the flesh?

The world has long been of one mind as to the great charm in the writings of John Ruskin; it feels his subtle insight into all forms of beauty; and it has made familiar truisms of his central lessons in Art. But it has hardly yet understood that he stands forth now, alone and inimitable, as a supreme master of our English tongue; that as preacher, prophet (nay, some amongst us do not hesitate to say as saint), he has done more than as master of Art; that his moral and social influence on our time, more than his æsthetic impulse, will be the chief memory for which our descendants will hold him in honour.

Such genius, such zeal, such self-devotion should have imposed itself upon the age without a dissentient voice; but the reputation of John Ruskin has been exposed to some singular difficulties. Above all, he is, to use an Italian phrase, *uomo antico*: a survival of a past age: a man of the thirteenth century pouring out sermons, denunciations, rhapsodies to the nineteenth century; and if Saint Bernard himself, in his garb of frieze and girdle of hemp, were to preach

amongst us in Hyde Park to-day, too many of us would listen awhile, and then straightway go about our business with a smile. But John Ruskin is not simply a man of the thirteenth century: he is a poet, a mystic, a missionary of the thirteenth century—romantic as was the young Dante in the days of his love and his chivalrous youth and his Florentine rapture in all beautiful things, or as was the young Petrarch in the lifetime of his Laura, or the young Francis beginning to dream of a regeneration of Christendom through the teaching of his barefoot Friars.

Now John Ruskin not only is in his soul a thirteenth-century poet and mystic, but, being this, he would literally have the nineteenth century go back to the thirteenth: he means what he says, he acts on what he means. And he defies fact, the set of many ages, the actual generation around him, and still calls on them, alone and in spite of neglect and rebuffs, to go back to the Golden Ages of the Past. He would not reject this description of himself: he would proudly accept it. But this being so, it is inevitable that much of his teaching—all the teaching for which he cares most in his heart—must be in our day the voice of one preaching in the wilderness.

He claims to be not merely poet of the beautiful, but missionary of the truth; not so much judge in Art as master in Philosophy. And as such he repudiates modern science, modern machinery, modern politics—in a sense modern civilisation, as we know it and make it. Not merely is it his ideal to get rid of these; but in his own way he sets himself manfully to extirpate these things in practice from the visible life of himself and of those who surround him. Such heroic impossibilities recoil on his own head. The nineteenth

century has been too strong for him. Iron, steam, science, democracy have thrust him aside, and have left him in his old age little but a solitary and most pathetic Prophet, such as a John the Baptist by Mantegna, unbending, undismayed, still crying out to a scanty band around him—'Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand!'

I am one who believes most devoutly in the need of repentance, and in the ultimate, if not early, advent of a kingdom of the Beautiful and the Good. But like the world around me, I hold by the nineteenth century and not by the thirteenth; or rather I trust that some Century to come may find means of reconciling the ages of Steam and the ages of Faith, of combining the best of all ages in one. Unluckily, as do other prophets, as do most mystics, John Ruskin will have undivided allegiance. With him, it is ever—all or none. Accept him and his lesson—wholly, absolutely, without murmur or doubt—or he will have none of your homage. And the consequence is that his devotees have been neither many nor impressive. His genius, as most men admit, will carry him at times into fabulous extravagances, and his exquisite tenderness of soul will ofttimes seem to be but a second childhood in the eyes of the world. Thus it has come to pass that the grotesque side of this noble Evangel of his has been perpetually thrust into the forefront of the fight; and those who have professed to expound the Gospel of Ruskin have been for the most part such lads and lasses as the world in its grossness regards with impatience, and turns from with a smile.

As one of the oldest and most fervent believers in his genius and the noble uses to which he has devoted it, I long to say a word or two in support of my belief:

not that I have the shadow of a claim to speak as his disciple, to defend his utterances, or to represent his thoughts. In one sense, no doubt, I stand at an opposite pole of ideas, and in literal and direct words, I could hardly adopt any one of the leading doctrines of his creed. As to mine, he probably rejects everything I hold sacred and true with violent indignation and scorn. Morally, spiritually, as seen through a glass darkly, I believe that his teachers and my teachers are essentially one, and may yet be combined in the greater harmony that is to be. But to all this I should despair of inducing him to agree, or even to listen with patience. He regards me, I fear, as an utterly lost soul, destined to nothing but evil in this world and the next. And did he not once long ago, in private communication and in public excommunication, consign me to outer darkness, and cover with indignant scorn every man and every thing in which I have put my trust?

The world has long been of one mind, I have said, as to the beauty of Ruskin's writing; but I venture to think that even yet full justice has not been rendered to his consummate mastery over our English tongue: that it has not been put high enough, and some of its unique qualities have not been perceived. Now I hold that in certain qualities, in given ways, and in some rarer passages of his, Ruskin not only surpasses every contemporary writer of prose (which indeed is obvious enough), but he calls out of our glorious English tongue notes more strangely beautiful and inspiring than any ever yet issued from that instrument. No writer of prose before or since has ever rolled forth such mighty fantasias, or reached such pathetic melodies in words, or composed long books in one sustained strain of limpid grace.

It is indeed very far from a perfect style: much less is it in any sense a model style, or one to be cultivated, studied, or followed. If any young aspirant were to think it could be imitated, better were a millstone hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea. No man can bend the bow of Ulysses; and if he dared to take down from its long rest the terrible weapon, such an one might give himself an ugly wound. Ulysses himself has shot with it wildly, madly, with preposterous overflying of the mark, and blind aiming at the wrong target. Ruskin, be it said in sorrow, has too often played unseemly pranks on his great instrument: is too often 'in excess,' as the Ethics put it, indeed he is usually 'in excess'; he has used his mastery in mere exultation in his own mastery; and, as he now knows himself, he has used it out of wantonness—rarely, but very rarely, as in *The Seven Lamps*, in a spirit of display, or with reckless defiance of sense, good taste, reserve of strength—yet never with affectation, never as a tradesman, as a hack.

We need not enter here on the interminable debate about what is called 'poetic prose,' whether poetic prose be a legitimate form of expressing ideas. A good deal of nonsense has been talked about it; and the whole matter seems too much a dispute about terms. If prose be ornate with flowers of speech inappropriate to the idea expressed, or studiously affected, or obtrusively luscious—it is bad prose. If the language be proper to verse but improper to prose—it is bad prose. If the cadences begin to be obvious, if they tend to be actually scanned as verses, if the images are remote, lyrical, piled over one another, needlessly complicated, if the passage has to be read twice before we grasp its meaning—then it is bad prose. On the other hand,

all ideas are capable of being expressed in prose, as well as in verse. They may be clothed with as much grace as is consistent with precision. If the sense be absolutely clear, the flow of words perfectly easy, the language in complete harmony with the thought, then no beauty in the phraseology can be misplaced—provided that this beauty be held in reserve, is to be unconsciously felt, not obviously thrust forward, and is always the beauty of prose, and not the beauty of verse.

It cannot be denied that Ruskin, especially in his earlier works, is too often obtrusively luscious, that his images are often lyrical, set in too profuse and gorgeous a mosaic. Be it so. But he is always perfectly, transparently clear, absolutely free from affected euphuism, never laboriously 'precious,' never grotesque, never eccentric. His besetting sins as a master of speech may be summed up in his passion for profuse imagery, and delight in an almost audible melody of words. But how different is this from the laborious affectation of what is justly condemned as the 'poetic prose' of a writer who tries to be fine, seeking to perform feats of composition, who flogs himself into a bastard sort of poetry, not because he enjoys it, but to impose upon an ignorant reader! This Ruskin never does. When he bursts the bounds of fine taste, and pelts us with perfumed flowers till we almost faint under their odour and their blaze of colour, it is because he is himself intoxicated with the joy of his blossoming thoughts, and would force some of his divine afflatus into our souls. The priestess of the Delphic god never spoke without inspiration, and then did not use the flat speech of daily life. Would that none ever spoke in books, until they felt the god working in their heart.

To be just, we should remember that a very large

part of all that Ruskin treats concerns some scene of beauty, some work of fine art, some earnest moral exhortation, some indignant rebuke to meanness—wherein passionate delight and passionate appeal are not merely lawful, but are of the essence of the lesson. Ruskin is almost always in an ecstasy of admiration, or in a fervour of sympathy, or in a grand burst of prophetic warning. It is his mission, his nature, his happiness so to be. And it is inevitable that such passion and eagerness should be clothed in language more remote from the language of conversation than is that of Swift or Hume. The language of the preacher is not, nor ought it to be, the language of the critic, the philosopher, the historian. Ruskin is a preacher: right or wrong he has to deliver his message, whether men will stay to hear it or not; and we can no more require him to limit his pace to the plain foot-plodding of unimpassioned prose than we can ask this of Saint Bernard or of Bossuet, of Jeremy Taylor or Thomas Carlyle.

Besides all this, Ruskin has shown that, where the business in hand is simple instruction, philosophical argument, or mechanical exposition, he is master of an English style of faultless ease, simplicity, and point. When he wants to describe a plain thing, a particular instrument for drawing, a habit of Turner's work, the exact form of a boat, or a tower. or a shell, no one can surpass him, or equal him, in the clearness and precision of his words. His little book on the *Elements of Drawing* is a masterpiece in lucid explanation of simple mechanical rules and practices. *Præterita*, *Fors Clavigera*, and the recent notes to reprinted works, contain easy bits of narration, of banter, of personal humour, that Swift, Defoe, Goldsmith, and Lamb might

envy. Turn to that much-abused book, *Unto this Last*—the central book of his life, as it is the turning-point of his career—it is almost wholly free from every fault of excess with which he has been charged. Men may differ as to the argument. But no capable critic will doubt that as a type of philosophical discussion, its form is as fine and as pure as the form of Berkeley or of Hume.

But when, his whole soul aglow with some scene of beauty, transfigured by a profound moral emotion, he breaks forth into one of those typical descants of his, our judgment may still doubt if the colouring be not over-charged and the composition too crowded for perfect art, but we are carried away by its beauty, its rhythm, its pathos. We know that the sentence is too long, preposterously, impossibly sustained—200 words and more—250, nay, 280 words without a single pause—each sentence with 40, 50, 60 commas, colons, and semi-colons—and yet the whole symphony flows on with such just modulation, the images melt so naturally into each other, the harmony of tone and the ease of words are so complete, that we hasten through the passage in a rapture of admiration. Milton often began, and at times completed, such a resounding voluntary on his glorious organ. But neither Milton, nor Browne, nor Jeremy Taylor was yet quite master of the mighty instrument. Ruskin, who comes after two centuries of further and continuous progress in this art, is master of the subtle instrument of prose. And though it be true that too often, in wanton defiance of calm judgment, he will fling to the winds his self-control, he has achieved in this rare and perilous art some amazing triumphs of mastery over language, such as the whole history of our literature cannot match.

Lovers of Ruskin (that is, all who read good English books) can recall, and many of them can repeat, hundreds of such passages, and they will grumble at an attempt to select any passage at all. But to make my meaning clear, I will turn to one or two very famous bits, not at all asserting that they are the most truly noble passages that Ruskin ever wrote, but as specimens of his more lyrical mood. He has himself spoken with slight of much of his earlier writing—often perhaps with undeserved humility. He especially regrets the *purpurei panni*, as he calls them, of *The Seven Lamps* and cognate pieces. I will not quote any of these *purpurei panni*, though I think that as *rhetorical prose*, as apodeictic perorations, English literature has nothing to compare with them. But they *are* rhetorical, somewhat artificial, manifest displays of eloquence; and we shall all agree that eloquent displays of rhetoric are not the best specimens of prose composition.

I take first a well-known piece of an early book (*Modern Painters*, vol. iv. chap. i., 1856), the old Tower of Calais Church, a piece which has haunted my memory for nearly forty years—

'The large neglect, the noble unsightliness of it; the record of its years written so visibly, yet without sign of weakness or decay; its stern wasteness and gloom, eaten away by the Channel winds, and overgrown with the bitter sea grasses; its slates and tiles all shaken and rent, and yet not falling; its desert of brickwork full of bolts, and holes, and ugly fissures, and yet strong, like a bare brown rock; its carelessness of what any one thinks or feels about it, putting forth no claim, having no beauty nor desirableness, pride, nor grace; yet neither asking for pity; not, as ruins are, useless and piteous, feebly or fondly garrulous of better days; but useful still, going through its own daily work,—as some old

fisherman, beaten grey by storm, yet drawing his daily nets: so it stands, with no complaint about its past youth, in blanched and meagre massiveness and serviceableness, gathering human souls together underneath it; the sound of its bells for prayer still rolling through its rents; and the grey peak of it seen far across the sea, principal of the three that rise above the waste of surfy sand and hillocked shore,—the lighthouse for life, and the belfry for labour, and this for patience and praise.'

This passage I take to be one of the most magnificent examples of the 'pathetic fallacy' in our language. Perhaps the 'pathetic fallacy' is second-rate art; the passage is too long—211 words alas! without one full-stop, and more than forty commas and other marks of punctuation—it has *trop de choses*, it has redundancies, tautologies, and artifices, if we are strictly severe —but what a picture, what pathos, what subtlety of observation, what nobility of association, and withal how complete is the unity of impression! How mournful, how stately is the cadence, most harmonious and yet peaceful is the phraseology, and how wonderfully do thought, the antique history, the picture, the musical bars of the whole piece combine in beauty! What fine and just images—'the large neglect,' the 'noble unsightliness.' The tower is 'eaten away by the Channel winds,' 'overgrown with bitter sea grasses.' It is 'careless,' 'puts forth no claim,' has 'no pride,' does not 'ask for pity,' is not 'fondly garrulous,' as other ruins are, but still goes through its work, 'like some old fisherman.' It stands blanched, meagre, massive, but still serviceable, making no complaint about its past youth. A wonderful bit of word-painting—and perhaps word-painting, at least on a big canvas, is not strictly lawful—but such a picture

as few poets and no prose-writer has surpassed! Byron would have painted it in deeper, fiercer strokes. Shelley and Wordsworth would have been less definite. Coleridge would not have driven home the moral so earnestly; though Tennyson might have embodied it in the stanzas of *In Memoriam.*

I should like to take this passage as a text to point to a quality of Ruskin's prose in which, I believe, he has surpassed all other writers. It is the quality of musical *assonance.* There is plenty of *alliteration* in Ruskin, as there is in all fine writers; but the musical harmony of sound in Ruskin's happiest efforts is something very different from *alliteration*, and much more subtle. Coarse, obtrusive, artificial *alliteration*, *i.e.* the recurrence of words with the same initial letter, becomes, when crudely treated or overdone, a gross and irritating form of affectation. But the prejudice against alliteration may be carried too far. Alliteration is the natural expression of earnest feeling in every form—it is a physiological result of passion and impetuosity; it becomes a defect when it is repeated too often, or in an obtrusive way, or when it becomes artificial and studied. Whilst alliteration is spontaneous, implicit not explicit, felt not seen, the natural working of a fine ear, it is not only a legitimate expedient both of prose and of verse, but is an indispensable accessory of the higher harmonies, whether of verse or prose.

Ruskin uses alliteration much (it must be admitted, in profusion), but he relies on a far subtler resource of harmony—that is *assonance*, or as I should prefer to name it, *consonance.* I have never seen this quality treated at all systematically, but I am convinced that it is at the basis of all fine cadences both in verse and in prose. By *consonance* I mean *the recurrence of*

the same, or of cognate, sounds, not merely in the first letter of words, but where the stress comes, in any part of a word, and that in sounds whether vowel or consonant. Grimm's law of interchangeable consonants applies; and all the well-known groupings of consonants may be noted. The liquids connote the sweeter, the gutturals the sterner ideas; the sibilants connect and organise the words. Of poets, perhaps Milton, Shelley, and Tennyson make the fullest use of this resource. We need not suppose that it is consciously sought, or in any sense studied, or even observed by the poet. But *consonance*, *i.e.* recurrence of the same or kindred sounds, is very visible when we look for it in a beautiful cadence. Take Tennyson's—

> 'Old Yew, which graspest at the stones
> That name the under-lying dead,
> Thy fibres net the dreamless head,
> Thy roots are wrapt about the bones.'

How much does the music, nay the impressiveness, of this stanza depend on *consonance*! The great booming **O** with which it opens, is repeated in the last word of the first and also of the last line. The cruel word 'graspest' is repeated in part in the harsh word 'stones.' Three lines, and six words in all, begin with the soft 'th': 'name' is echoed by 'net,' 'under-lying' by 'dreamless'; the 'r' of 'roots' is heard again in 'wrapt,' the 'b' in 'fibres,' in 'about,' and 'bones.' These are not all accidental cases of *consonance*.

This musical *consonance* is quite present in fine prose, although many powerful writers seem to have had but little ear for its effects. Such men as Swift, Defoe, Gibbon, Macaulay seldom advance beyond alliteration in the ordinary sense. But true *consonance*, or musical

correspondence of note, is very perceptible in the prose of Milton, of Sir Thomas Browne, of Burke, of Coleridge, of De Quincey. Above all, it is especially marked in our English Bible, and in the Collects and grander canticles of the Prayer Book ; and is the source of much of their power over us. Of all the masters of prose literature, John Ruskin has made the finest use of this resource, and with the most delicate and mysterious power. And this is no doubt due to his mind being saturated from childhood with the harmonies of our English Bible, and to his speaking to us with religious solemnity and in Biblical tones.

This piece about the tower of Calais Church is full of this beautiful and subtle form of alliteration or colliteration : 'the large neglect, the noble unsightliness of it'—'the record of its years written so visibly, yet without sign of weakness or decay'—'the sound of its bells for prayer still rolling through its rents.' Here in a single line are three liquid double '**ll**' ; there are six '**s**' ; there are five '**r**' in seven words—'soūnd rōlling throūgh rents' is finely expressive of a peal of bells. And the passage ends with a triple alliteration, the second of the three being inverted : 'bel' echoing to 'lab'—'the lighthouse for life, and the belfry for labour, and this—for patience and praise.'

Turn to another famous passage (*Modern Painters*, vol. iv. chap. xix.), a somewhat over-wrought, possibly unjust picture, stained as usual with the original sin of Calvinism, but a wonderful piece of imaginative description. It is the account of the peasant of the Valais, in the grand chapter on 'Mountain Gloom'—

'They do not understand so much as the name of beauty, or of knowledge. They understand dimly that of virtue.

Love, patience, hospitality, faith,—these things they know. To glean their meadows side by side, so happier; to bear the burden up the breathless mountain flank, unmurmuringly; to bid the stranger drink from their vessel of milk; to see at the foot of their low death-beds a pale figure upon a cross, dying also, patiently;—in this they are different from the cattle and from the stones; but, in all this unrewarded so far as concerns the present life. For them, there is neither hope nor passion of spirit; for them, neither advance nor exultation. Black bread, rude roof, dark night, laborious day, weary arm at sunset; and life ebbs away. No books, no thoughts, no attainments, no rest; except only sometimes a little sitting in the sun under the church wall, as the bell tolls thin and far in the mountain air; a pattering of a few prayers, not understood, by the altar-rails of the dimly gilded chapel, and so, back to the sombre home, with the cloud upon them still unbroken—that cloud of rocky gloom, born out of the wild torrents and ruinous stones, and unlightened even in their religion, except by the vague promise of some better things unknown, mingled with threatening, and obscured by an unspeakable horror,—a smoke, as it were, of martyrdom, coiling up with the incense; and amidst the images of tortured bodies and lamenting spirits in hurtling flames, the very cross, for them, dashed more deeply than for others with gouts of blood.'

The piece is over-wrought as well as unjust, with somewhat false emphasis, but how splendid in colour and majestic in language! 'To bear the burden up the breathless mountain flank unmurmuringly'—is fine in spite of its obvious scansion and its profuse alliteration. 'At their low death-beds a pale figure upon a cross, dying also, patiently'—will not scan, and it is charged with solemnity by soft 'l,' 'd,' and 'p,' repeated. How beautifully imitative is the line, '*as the bell tolls thin and far in the mountain air*'—a, e, i, o, u—with

ten monosyllables and one dissyllable! '*The crŏss dashed more deeply with gŏŭts of blŏŏd.*' No one who has ever read that passage can pass along the Catholic valleys of the Swiss Alps without having it in his mind. Overcharged, and somewhat consciously and designedly *pictorial*, as it is, it is a truly wonderful example of mastery over language and sympathetic insight.

We may turn now to a passage or two, in which perhaps Ruskin is quite at his best. He has written few things finer, and indeed more exactly truthful, than his picture of the Campagna of Rome. This is in the Preface to the second edition of *Modern Painters*, 1843.

'Perhaps there is no more impressive scene on earth than the solitary extent of the Campagna of Rome under evening light. Let the reader imagine himself for the moment withdrawn from the sounds and motion of the living world, and sent forth alone into this wild and wasted plain. The earth yields and crumbles beneath his foot, tread he never so lightly, for its substance is white, hollow, and carious, like the dusty wreck of the bones of men. The long knotted grass waves and tosses feebly in the evening wind, and the shadows of its motion shake feverishly along the banks of ruin that lift themselves to the sunlight. Hillocks of mouldering earth heave around him, as if the dead beneath were struggling in their sleep. Scattered blocks of black stone, four-square remnants of mighty edifices, not one left upon another, lie upon them to keep them down. A dull purple poisonous haze stretches level along the desert, veiling its spectral wrecks of massy ruins, on whose rents the red light rests, like dying fire on defiled altars; the blue ridge of the Alban Mount lifts itself against a solemn space of green, clear, quiet sky. Watch-towers of dark clouds stand

steadfastly along the promontories of the Apennines. From the plain to the mountains, the shattered aqueducts, pier beyond pier, melt into the darkness, like shadowy and countless troops of funeral mourners, passing from a nation's grave.'

Here is a piece of pure description without passion or moralising; the passage is broken, as we find in all good modern prose, into sentences of forty or fifty words. It is absolutely clear, literally true, an imaginative picture of one of the most impressive scenes in the world. All who know it remember 'the white, hollow, carious earth,' like bone dust, 'the long knotted grass,' the 'banks of ruin' and 'hillocks of mouldering earth,' the 'dull purple poisonous haze,' 'the shattered aqueducts,' like shadowy mourners at a nation's grave. The whole piece may be set beside Shelley's poem from the *Euganean Hills*, and it produces a kindred impression. In Ruskin's prose, perhaps for the first time in literature, there are met the eye of the landscape painter and the voice of the lyric poet—and both are blended in perfection. It seems to me idle to debate, whether or not it is legitimate to describe in prose a magnificent scene, whether it be lawful to set down in prose the ideas which this scene kindles in an imaginative soul, whether it be permitted to such an artist to resort to any resource of grace or power which the English language can present.

This magnificent piece of word-painting is hardly surpassed by anything in our literature. It cannot be said to carry alliteration to the point of affectation. But the reader may easily perceive by analysis how greatly its musical effect depends on profusion of subtle *consonance*. The 'liquids' give grace; the broad ō and ā, and their diphthong sounds, give solemnity; the gut-

turals and double consonants give strength. 'A **dull** **purple** **p**oisonous haze **stretches** level along the **desert**' —'on whose **rents** the **red** light **rests** like **dying** **fire** on **defiled** **altars**.' Here, in thirteen words, are five **r**, four **t**, four **d**, three **l**—'**Dark** **clouds** **stand** **stead**fastly'—'the **promontories** of the **Apennines**.' The last clause is a favourite cadence of Ruskin's: its beautiful melody depends on a very subtle and complex scheme of *consonance*. '**From** the **plain** to the **mountains**, the **shattered** aque**d**u**cts**, **pier** beyon**d** **pier**, **melt** into the **darkness**, like **shadowy** and **countless** troo**ps** of funeral **mourners**, **pāssing** **from** a **nātion's** **grāve**.' It is impossible to suppose that the harmonies of this 'coda' are wholly accidental. They are the effect of a wonderful ear for tonality in speech, certainly unconscious, arising from passionate feeling more than from reflection. And Mr. Ruskin himself would no doubt be the first to deny that such a thought had ever crossed his mind;—perhaps he would himself denounce with characteristic vehemence any such vivisection applied to his living and palpitating words.

I turn now to a little book of his written in the middle of his life, at the height of his power, just before he entered on his second career of social philosopher and new evangelist. *The Harbours of England* was published more than forty years ago in 1856 (*ætat.* 37), and it has been happily reprinted in a cheap and smaller form, 1895. It is, I believe, as an education in art, as true and as masterly as anything Ruskin ever wrote. But I wish now to treat it only from the point of view of English literature. And I make bold to say that no book in our language shows more varied resources over prose-writing, or an

English more pure, more vigorous, more enchanting. It contains hardly any of those tirades with which the preacher loves to drench his hearers—torrents from the fountains of his ecstasy, or his indignation. The book is full of enthusiasm and of poetry; but it also contains a body of critical and expository matter—simple, lucid, graceful, incisive as anything ever set down by the hand of John Ruskin, or indeed of any other master of our English prose.

Every one remembers the striking sentence with which it opens—a sentence, it may be, exaggerated in meaning, but how melodious, how impressive—'Of all things, living or lifeless [note the five l, the four i, in the first six words], upon this strange earth, there is but one which, having reached the mid-term of appointed human endurance on it, I still regard with unmitigated amazement.' This object is the bow of a Boat—'the blunt head of a common, bluff, undecked sea-boat lying aside in its furrow of beach sand. . . .'

'The sum of Navigation is in that. You may magnify it or decorate it as you will: you will not add to the wonder of it. Lengthen it into hatchet-like edge of iron,—strengthen it with complex tracery of ribs of oak,—carve it and gild it till a column of light moves beneath it on the sea,—you have made no more of it than it was at first. That rude simplicity of bent plank, that [? *should be 'which'*] can breast its way through the death that is in the deep sea, has in it the soul of shipping. Beyond this, we may have more work, more men, more money; we cannot have more miracle.'

The whole passage is loaded with imagery, with fancy, but hardly with conceits; it is wonderfully ingenious, impressive, suggestive, so that a boat is never

quite the same thing to any one who has read this passage in early life. The ever-changing curves of the boat recall 'the image of a sea-shell.' 'Every plank is a Fate, and has men's lives wreathed in the knots of it.' This bow of the boat is 'the gift of another world.' Without it, we should be 'chained to our rocks.' The very nails that fasten the planks are 'the rivets of the fellowship of the world.' 'Their iron does more than draw lightning out of heaven, it leads love round the earth.' It is possible to call this fantastic, over-wrought, lyrical: it is not possible to dispute its beauty, charm, and enthusiasm. It seems to me to carry imaginative prose exactly to that limit which to pass would cease to be fitting in prose; to carry fancy to the very verge of that which, if less sincere, less true, less pathetic, would justly be regarded as Euphuistic conceit.

And so this splendid hymn to the sea-boat rolls on to that piece which I take to be as fine and as true as anything ever said about the sea, even by our sea-poets, Byron or Shelley—

'Then also, it is wonderful on account of the greatness of the enemy that it does battle with. To lift dead weight; to overcome length of languid space; to multiply or systematise a given force; this we may see done by the bar, or beam, or wheel, without wonder. But to war with that living fury of waters, to bare its breast, moment after moment, against the unwearied enmity of ocean,—the subtle, fitful, implacable smiting of the black waves, provoking each other on, endlessly, all the infinite march of the Atlantic rolling on behind them to their help, and still to strike them back into a wreath of smoke and futile foam, and win its way against them, and keep its charge of life from them;—does any other soulless thing do as much as this?'

This noble paragraph has truth, originality, music, majesty, with that imitative power of sound which is usually thought to be possible only in poetry, and is very rarely successful even in poetry. Homer has often caught echoes of the sea in his majestic hexameters; Byron and Shelley occasionally recall it; as does Tennyson in its milder moods and calm rest. But I know no other English prose but this which, literally and nobly describing the look of a wild sea, suggests in the very rhythm of its cadence, and in the music of its roar, the tumultuous surging of the surf —'to war with that living fury of waters'—'the subtle, fitful, implacable smiting of the black waves'—'still to strike them back into a wreath of smoke and futile foam, and win its way against them.' Here we seem not only to see before our eyes, but to hear with our ears, the crash of a stout boat plunging through a choppy sea off our southern coasts.

I would take this paragraph as the high-water mark of Ruskin's prose method. But there are scores and hundreds of passages in his books of equal power and perfection. This book on *The Harbours of England* is full of them. *O si sic omnia!* Alas! a few pages further on, even of this admirable book, which is so free from them, comes one of those ungovernable, overladen, hypertrophied outbursts of his, which so much deform his earlier books. It is a splendid piece of conception: each phrase, each sentence is beautiful; the images are appropriate and cognate, they flow naturally out of each other; and the whole has a most harmonious glow. But alas! as English prose, it is *impossible.* It has 255 words without a pause, and 26 intermediate signs of punctuation. No human breath could utter such a sentence: even the eye is

bewildered; and, at last, the most docile and attentive reader sinks back, stunned and puzzled by such a torrent of phrases and such a wilderness of thoughts.[1]

He is speaking of the fisher-boat as the most venerable kind of ship. He stands musing on the shingle between the black sides of two stranded fishing-boats. He watches 'the clear heavy water-edge of ocean rising and falling close to their bows.' And then he turns to the boats.

'And the dark flanks of the fishing-boats all aslope above, in their shining quietness, hot in the morning sun, rusty and seamed, with square patches of plank nailed over their rents; just rough enough to let the little flat-footed fisher-children haul or twist themselves up to the gunwales, and drop back again along some stray rope; just round enough to remind us, in their broad and gradual curves, of the sweep of the green surges they know so well, and of the hours when those old sides of seared timber, all ashine with the sea, plunge and dip into the deep green purity of the mounded waves more joyfully than a deer lies down among the grass of Spring, the soft white cloud of foam opening momentarily at the bows, and fading or flying high into the breeze where the sea-gulls toss and shriek,—the joy and beauty of it, all the while, so mingled with the sense of unfathomable danger, and the human effort and sorrow going on perpetually from age to age, waves rolling for ever, and winds moaning for ever, and faithful hearts trusting and sickening for ever, and brave lives dashed away about the rattling beach like weeds for ever; and still at the helm of every lonely boat, through starless

[1] In the second volume of *Modern Painters*, p. 132, may be found a mammoth sentence, I suppose the most gigantic sentence in English prose. It has 619 words without a full stop, and 80 intermediate signs of punctuation, together with four clauses in brackets. It has been reprinted in the revised two volumes edition of 1883, where it fills four whole pages, i. 347-351.

night and hopeless dawn, His hand, who spread the fisher's net over the dust of the Sidonian palaces, and gave into the fisher's hand the keys of the kingdom of heaven.'

It is a grand passage, ruined, I think, by excess of eagerness and sympathetic passion. Neither Shelley nor Keats ever flung his soul more keenly into an inert object and made it live to us, or rather lived in it, felt its heart beat in his, and made his own its sorrows, its battles, its pride. So Tennyson, gazing on the Yew which covers the loved grave, cries out—

> 'I seem to fail from out my blood
> And grow incorporate into thee.'

So the poet sees the ship that brings his lost Arthur home, hears the noise about the keel, and the bell struck in the night. Thus Ruskin, watching the fisherman's boat upon the beach, sees in his mind's eye the past and the future of the boat, the swell of the green billows, and the roar of the ocean, and still at the helm, unseen but of him, an Almighty Hand guiding it in life and in death.

Had this noble vision been rehearsed with less passion, and in sober intervals of breathing, we could have borne it. The first twelve or fourteen lines, ending with 'the deep green purity of the mounded waves,' form a full picture. But, like a runaway horse, our poet plunges on where no human lungs and no ordinary brain can keep up the giddy pace; and for seven or eight lines more we are pelted with new images till we feel like landsmen caught in a sudden squall. And then how grand are the last ten lines—'the human effort and sorrow going on perpetually from age to age—!' down to that daring antithesis of the fisherman of Tyre and the fisherman of St. Peter's!

I cannot call it a conceit; but it would have been a conceit in the hands of any one less sincere, less passionate, not so perfectly saturated with Biblical imagery and language.

I have dwelt upon this passage as a typical example of Ruskin's magnificent power over the literary instrument, of his intense sympathy, of his vivid imagination, and alas! also of his ungovernable flux of ideas and of words. It is by reason of this wilful megalomania and plethoric habit, that we must hesitate to pronounce him the greatest master of English prose in our whole literature; but it is such mastery over language, such power to triumph over almost impossible conditions and difficulties, that compel us to regard him as one who could have become the noblest master of prose ever recorded, if he would only have set himself to curb his Pegasus from the first, and systematically to think of his reader's capacity for taking in, as well as of his own capacity for pouring forth, a torrent of glowing thoughts.

As a matter of fact, John Ruskin himself undertook to curb his Pegasus, and, like Turner or Beethoven, distinctly formed and practised 'a second manner.' That second manner coincides with the great change in his career, when he passed from critic of art to be social reformer and moral philosopher. The change was of course not absolute; but whereas, in the earlier half of his life, he had been a writer about Beauty and Art, who wove into his teaching lessons on social, moral, and religious problems, so he became, in the later part of his life, a worker about Society and Ethics, who filled his practical teaching with judgments about the beautiful in Nature and in Art. That second career dates from about the year 1860, when he began to

write *Unto this Last*, which was finally published in 1862.

I myself judge that book to be not only the most original and creative work of John Ruskin, but the most original and creative work in pure literature since *Sartor Resartus*. But I am now concerning myself with form; and, as a matter of form, I would point to it as a work containing almost all that is noble in Ruskin's written prose, with hardly any, or very few, of his excesses and mannerisms. It is true that, p. 147-8, we have a single sentence of 242 words and 52 intermediate stops before we come to the pause. But this is occasional; and the book as a whole is a masterpiece of pure, incisive, imaginative, lucid English. If one had to plead the cause of Ruskin before the Supreme Court in the Republic of Letters, one would rely on that book as a type of clearness, wit, eloquence, versatility, passion.

From the publication of *Unto this Last*, in 1862, John Ruskin distinctly adopted his later manner. Two volumes of selections from Ruskin's works were published in 1893 by George Allen, the compilation of some anonymous editor. They are of nearly equal size and of periods of equal length. The first series consists of extracts between 1843 and 1860 from *Modern Painters*, *Seven Lamps*, *Stones of Venice*, and minor lectures, articles, and letters anterior to 1860. The second series, 1860-1888, contains selections from *Unto this Last*, *Fors*, *Præterita*, and the lectures and treatises subsequent to 1860. Now, it will be seen that in the second series the style is more measured, more mature, more practical, more simple. It is rare to find the *purpurei panni* which abound in the first series, or the sentences of 200 words, or the ostentatious piling up of luscious imagery and tumultuous fugues in oral

symphony. The 'first state' of a plate by Ruskin has far richer effects and more vivid light and shade than any example of his 'second state.'

Alas! the change came too late—too late in his life, too late in his career. When *Unto this Last* was finally published, John Ruskin was forty-three: he had already written the most elaborate and systematic of all his books—those on which his world-wide fame still rests. He had long passed *il mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*—and even the middle of his own long life; his energy, his health, his hopes were not what they had been in his glorious youth and early manhood: his mission became consciously to raise men's moral standard in life, not to raise their sense of the beautiful in Art. The old mariner still held us with his glittering eye, and forced us to listen to his wondrous tale, but he spoke like a man whose voice shook with the memory of all that he had seen and known, over whom the deep waters had passed. I am one of those who know that John Ruskin has told us in his second life things more true, and more important even, than he told us in his first life. But yet I cannot bring myself to hold that, as magician of words, his later teaching has the mystery and the glory which hung round the honeyed lips of the 'Oxford graduate.'

If, then, John Ruskin be not in actual achievement the greatest master who ever wrote in English prose, it is only because he refused to chasten his passion and his imagination until the prime of life was past. A graceful poet and a great moralist said—

> 'Prune thou thy words; the thoughts control
> That o'er thee swell and throng:—
> They will condense within thy soul,
> And change to purpose strong.'

This lesson Ruskin never learned until he was growing grey, and even now he only observes it so long as the spirit moves him, or rather does not move him too keenly. He has rarely suffered his thoughts to condense within his soul. Far from controlling them, he has spurred and lashed them into fury, so that they swell and throng over him and his readers, too often changing into satiety and impotence. Every other faculty of a great master of speech, except reserve, husbanding of resources, and patience, he possesses in measure most abundant—lucidity, purity, brilliance, elasticity, wit, fire, passion, imagination, majesty, with a mastery over all the melody of cadence that has no rival in the whole range of English literature.

CHAPTER III

RUSKIN AS PROPHET

On one of those glorious days of September which spread over the Weald a luminous haze, such as so often envelops the Lago Maggiore, two men were strolling on the Blackdown in Sussex, and stood watching the sun about to set behind the hangers of Selborne and the chalk downs that crown the city of Alfred. The elder man, whose home was near, had been pointing out to his younger friend, a painter established in France, the topography of the country and the various beauties of the spot. The young artist stood enraptured as the westering sun threw a deeper glow across the purple heather and the russet bracken, which nestled thick round the hillocks of saffron sand. It is one of those rare oases in the southern and home counties which still defy the advance of modern civilisation, where the peewit and the kestrel are undisturbed, and the manor can still claim the open down by the ancient name of 'the waste.'

'Such an evening makes me think of that wonderful description of the sunset painted by Turner for his *Old Téméraire*, which Ruskin has given in the *Modern Painters*,' said the Professor. 'Do you remember the passage—I copied it out but yesterday—"the whole sky from the zenith to the horizon becomes one molten mantling sea of colour and fire; every black bar turns

into massy gold, every ripple and wave into unsullied shadowless crimson, and purple, and scarlet, and colours for which there are no words in the language, and no ideas in the mind"?'

'Yes,' said the painter, 'Ruskin is a brilliant writer and has said some fine things in his day. But his day was fifty years ago. In our studio in Paris, we say, "Nous avons changé tout cela"—he is *passé, vieux jeu.* Why, even in the luscious bit that you have quoted, there are *trop de choses*, and a *fausse emphase* in every line. He should come over to us at old Bourbeux's and learn what modern art has to say about low tones.'

'Take care that you do not carry lowness of tone too far down,' said the elder man; 'you young artists are curiously ungrateful to the real author of the revival of art sense within the last fifty years. What was art in England—taste, knowledge, feeling for the truly beautiful—during the first half of the century, and who got us out of that slough of convention and vulgarity?'

'John Ruskin had much to do with stirring you up in the last generation,' said the painter, 'but we have passed entirely beyond his range. He knows almost nothing of what art has been doing outside of England in the last forty years—hardly enough to denounce it with intelligence. France, Germany, even America and Spain, have given us new lights since *Modern Painters* was finished; and we have a wholly new school of æsthetic philosophy which is not bound to worship Fra Angelico and the early Middle Ages as the sole source of true art. Art is its own religion, its own morality; and we want neither Bible nor missal to teach us how to paint. It is the business of the artist to show men what he sees, what they might see if they

were artists, to show them everything and anything that can be seen, as he sees it. It is the business of the priest and the schoolmaster to teach us what is holy, or pure, or true. Now Ruskin is priest and schoolmaster first, and artist afterwards; and thus his place may be in the pulpit, but certainly not in the studio.'

'Oh! let us not get into a discussion about "Art for Art," said the Professor. 'You know what I think; you might as well ask me to accept "drink for drunky," or "talk for talkee." Did you ever hear Tennyson on "Art for Art"—which he calls the Road to Hell? But, even from your own point of view, you new men are shamefully unmindful of what you owe to the founder of all that is healthy and fruitful in our English love of art, what there is of it to-day. I profess no gospel of Ruskin, and to me, as you know, Bible, Fra Angelico, and thirteenth century are nothing but tentative efforts in the long search upwards for a higher humanity. I neither worship mediæval saints nor the *Fors Clavigera* of any prophet, major or minor, old or new. But I see this, that in my own memory of some fifty years, a deep and universal change has come over the thoughtful part of our nation—a love of beauty, a sense of all that was beautiful in the past, a working consciousness of the importance of art in life, and at least industry and zeal in trying to brighten our life and purge it from vulgarity. And the real founder of this new sense was the "Oxford graduate" of 1843.'

'Well,' said the painter, 'I have not studied the literature of modern art, but I should have thought that, of Englishmen, Thomas Carlyle was the true author of a sounder feeling in our generation. And have we not a dozen masters in criticism, philosophy, and imagination quite as effective as Ruskin: poets

like Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne—historians like Symonds, Passavant, Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Perkins, Lindsay—critics like Colvin, Pater, and Middleton—painters like Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Watts, Morris, Leighton — to say nothing of all that France and Germany have poured forth in these forty years? Why, we have a dozen masters, and a score of "schools" and art movements: the Hellenic, the Japanese, the Hindoo, the Persian types. Rossetti goes one way, Millais another way, and William Morris takes a line of his own. Watts and Hunt have nothing in common; and the new geniuses who open galleries and demand our shillings in Bond Street and Piccadilly have never read *Modern Painters*, and could hardly tell you the name of its author. Art in England—nay, in Europe—is now a genuine race open to all comers on the principle of "go-as-you-please," and it is quite impossible to father it on John Ruskin or any other man, or any single impulse whatever.'

'There you are wrong, my dear boy,' said the Professor; 'you painters and students of art get into a groove, follow a given school (right or wrong); and everything but that looks to you foolish or ugly, just as a well-dressed man or woman quite laughs at the collar or the sleeve of a year or two ago, or it may be of a year or two hence. There are a dozen art movements to-day, and I will not deny that many of them have in them original elements of promise, although far apart from each other. I am the last man who would swear by all that Ruskin commands us to swear by, much less one who despises all that he anathematises. But I know this, having no interest at all in any special school or any æsthetic gospel whatever, that all that is healthy, noble, or promising

in any school or any gospel of art to-day comes out of the impulse that was given to it more than fifty years ago when *Modern Painters* burst upon our people. It is very likely that Carlyle was the inspiration of that book, as Carlyle was the master of Ruskin through life. But Carlyle could no more have done the poetic and artistic work of Ruskin himself than Samson could have composed the Psalms of David. No doubt the "Oxford graduate" had other teachers—Byron, Scott, Coleridge, Tennyson, Newman, to say nothing of Dante, the Alps, and the Bible. But he stands alone as the original founder of a new effort towards the beautiful in this century—a task which no one but he could have attempted or conceived, and in which he has never had the smallest colleague or help.'

'Oh yes,' said the painter, 'I know that in England you look upon art as a branch of philosophy, morals, religion—*religion!*' he broke into a laugh. 'Does not Ruskin say that "all art is adoration," and also that "ornament is man's delight in God's work"? I should like to hear the reverend gentleman preach on that text in our Salon next May.'

'Cart-ropes and wild horses would not drag him there,' said the other, 'and if you got him inside, he would vomit. Your quotations are wrong. Ruskin does not say that *all* art is adoration: as indeed he would not look for "adoration" in the Salon, nor for "delight in God's work" in the Champ de Mars and its erections from the Eiffel Tower downwards. He said "*great* art is adoration"; he said "*noble* ornament is man's delight in God's work"—and that makes a difference. But on both sides of the Channel all competent judges have seen how all that is masculine and

hopeful in English art (whatever be its technical faults and its insular crudities) springs from the roots of it, that go deep into the poetic, social, and religious energy still extant in the cultured body of Englishmen. Why, the latest and best French critic of our modern art—a man who knows more about English painters than any other living foreigner—tells you that, France apart, England alone has a national school of painting, and it owes that quality to the culture—the poetic, social, and religious training—common to the English school.'

'Well, I know Robert de la Sizeranne,' said the painter, 'and a fine judge he is, but he is as much alive as any of us to the feeble drawing and the crude colouring which seem to satisfy you at home. You go into raptures over things that in our studios would be treated as the niggling of an amateur and the sentimentalisms of a schoolgirl. As de Sizeranne says at the end of his book, much of English painting may be interesting as literature, but it is not beautiful as art.'

'We will not discuss our English school of painting,' said the elder man, 'for I am quite as much aware of its shortcomings as de Sizeranne; indeed, I think he overestimates some of our living men, and is rather more *ἄρεσκος* than a critic should be. I quoted him as a high and independent authority for two propositions which are as true as they are important. The first is that all that is great in modern English art and love of art is derived from its earnest desire to reach a noble purpose; the second is that, of all that is best in English art or in Englishmen's love of art, the inspiration is drawn from John Ruskin. One of the best of foreign judges does not hesitate to call it a revolution in art, and to trace its origin to its true author. I

doubt if any English writer has yet placed the influence of Ruskin on so high a ground, or has worked out so fully all that this implies, as is done by the author of *La Peinture Anglaise Contemporaine*. It has been left to a Frenchman to do full justice to our great Master in the Beautiful.'

'The master who tells you that the two Hunts have painted far finer things than Raphael or Claude,' cried the painter.

'I am not going to defend all Ruskin's verdicts upon pictures,' replied his friend, 'for that is not the matter in hand, nor do I pretend to be a judge. I dare say you may be right in telling me that he has declared at least twenty different works to be each "the most entirely lovely work of man's hand," and an illuminated missal to be worth the whole of the Vatican *stanze*. But that is a detail. Every man who has stepped out from the crowd to teach a new gospel, and still more if he sets rolling a real revolution in thought or in taste, will certainly commit himself to many a fantastic paradox. The poets, the prophets, the reformers would be nothing without their extravagances, and nobody but a critic remembers them at all. What wild stuff Carlyle flung out at times, or Shelley, or Coleridge, Victor Hugo, or Goethe!'

'Or Comte?' broke in the painter, with a smile.

'We all of us have the defects of our qualities,' said the Professor, without noticing the interruption, 'and the more vivid and numerous the qualities, the more startling are the eccentricities of their occasional outbreaks. You as a painter, my young friend, very naturally look on Ruskin as a critic of painting, and you possibly think of him as nothing else. But I assure you, having studied him myself these fifty years,

that his teaching about painting is but one of the dozen other objects to which his life has been dedicated. And perhaps you will tell me it is a fine example of Ruskinian paradox when I say that what he has written about pictures is far from being the noblest part of his work.'

'Well,' said the painter, 'I have read bits of *Modern Painters*, and some of the *Lectures*, and I have seen a lot of extracts from his books, mostly about painting, but I am not well posted up in the Gospel according to Ruskin, which I find too voluminous for me, nor do I want to be told to spend a year in trying to copy the marks on a lump of granite.'

'I should be surprised if you could give the very names of one-tenth of Ruskin's books,' said the other. 'Such odd names, too,' said the painter aside. 'It is strange,' continued the Professor, 'how very few even of the professed admirers and devotees of Ruskin have really read the whole of his books in any serious way. The very bulk of them is portentous; they fill by themselves a goodly bookcase. And the range of subject, the variety of treatment, the unexpected flashes across the whole heaven of invention, are no less astonishing than their bulk. Poetry, philosophy, ethics, theology, history, mythology, geology, botany, mineralogy, music, architecture, painting, sculpture, engraving, gardening, agriculture, gymnastics, education, manufacturing, politics, and the general ordering of families, societies, and nations, are a few of the topics that he treats. He said once, that if he announced a lecture on mineralogy, he was pretty certain to come round in it to Cistercian architecture, and a lecture on Cistercian architecture would most probably open with problems of mineralogy. One never knows, from sentence to sentence,

into what heights or depths he is about to conduct us——'

'Does he know himself?' said the painter parenthetically.

'Just as John Morley said that Carlyle had compressed the Gospel of the Eternal Silences into thirty handsome volumes,' the Professor continued, 'so we may say that Ruskin has expanded the Gospel of the Eternal Beauties into three hundred exquisite volumes.'

'And am I expected to cram up all these three hundred books before I can get a picture hung?' said the painter ruefully.

'I am trying to show you,' said the other, 'that the work of John Ruskin has a range far wider and deeper than painting, and you might differ from him in almost all that he has written about particular pictures, and yet be convinced that he had effected a certain moral and æsthetic revolution in English thought. I am old enough to remember the look of things in England in the first half of the present century. Ugh! the furniture, the carpets, the walls and mouldings painted to imitate marble and wood, the carpenters'-gothic churches, the Tudoresque villas, the *Books of Beauty* and the *Gentlemen's Seats* or *Views of Italy* which lay on the tables with gilt legs and Berlin-wool mats. Claude, Guido, Maclise, and Etty were the painters in vogue. Turner was considered to be a madman; the Royal Academy as formed under Lawrence was supreme arbiter of taste; and the Houses of Parliament was the last word in architecture. From that Malebolge of bad taste and unnatural convention we have been rescued by John Ruskin.'

'Well, I thought your æsthetic wall-papers, carpets, and tea-kettles were the invention of old William

Morris,' said the painter. 'And had not Burne-Jones, over whom they have now begun to rave in Paris, a good deal to do with improving your ideas of art? And does not the Academy owe something to its presidents? Surely Ruskin did not form the style of Whistler, or of Mason, to say nothing of all the paulo-post-future Raphaelites and the preter-pluperfect Turnerians who now hold the field. You will tell me next that Ruskin was the grandfather of the *Yellow Book*! There are a dozen schools and masters competing for the prize to-day: they all differ amongst themselves; and not one of them has affiliated itself to Ruskin's Guild of St. George, nor owns him as its High Priest.'

'No! nor was Luther the founder of the Quakers, nor is Cardinal Newman altogether responsible for Father Black. But, as there might have been no Reformation without Luther, and no Anglican Ritualism without Newman, so there would be no new Æstheticism if there had been no Ruskin. New movements are ultimately founded on new ideas—spiritual inspirations—which work indirectly in subtle and unconscious ways, having roots far down in human sympathies and covering large areas of human life. Ruskin was not a teacher of painting, nor a professor of architecture, nor an expert in house decoration, nor a connoisseur in *bric-à-brac*. We have plenty of these to-day, and many of them, we cannot doubt, have gone further into the history of special arts and, with no creed of their own in particular, have reached to a more cosmopolitan sense of the beautiful. With all Ruskin's vast range of subject and of sympathy, it would be impossible that he or any one man could grasp the whole field of human art. A man who has never even seen the Bosphorus or Attica, the Nile or the Ganges, who has

not even studied with patience Sancta Sophia, nor Roman basilicas, nor the tombs or mosques of Cairo or of Delhi—much less Persian and Japanese handiwork—has still, of course, a good deal to learn. But all this is a minor detail. To found a new movement is a different thing from editing an Encyclopædia. Ruskin's voluminous works have a wide range, but they are not an Encyclopædia of Art. He has given the inspiration: it has taken a dozen forms—forms different from each other, many of them such as he would violently repudiate. There are potentates enthroned to-day who know not Joseph. But it was Joseph, after all, who could interpret the dream aright, and told the king how to save himself and his people.'

'Do you mean,' said the painter, 'that Ruskin is a man who makes an epoch—a Bacon, a Darwin—or, perhaps you will say, a St. Francis, or a John Knox?'

'I mean nothing of the kind,' said the Professor, 'though there may be some men, and several women, who would not hesitate to say it. The influence of Ruskin has been part of the great romantic, historical, catholic, and poetic revival of which Scott, Carlyle, Coleridge, Freeman, Newman, and Tennyson in our own country have been leading spirits within the last three generations in England. There is no need to compare him with any one of these as a source of original intellectual force. He owns Scott and Carlyle as his masters, and he might vehemently repudiate certain of the others altogether. His work has been to put this romantic, historical, and genuine sympathy inspired by Scott, Wordsworth, and Carlyle into a new understanding of the arts of form. The philosophic impulse, assuredly, was not his own. It is a compound of Scott, Carlyle, Dante, and the Bible. The compound

is strange, for it makes him talk sometimes like a Puritan father and sometimes like a Cistercian monk. At times he talks as Flora MacIvor talked to young Waverley, at other times like Thomas Carlyle inditing a Latter-day Pamphlet. But to transfuse into this modern generation of Englishmen this romantic, catholic, historical, and social sympathy as applied to the arts of form, needed gifts that neither Scott, nor Carlyle, nor Newman, nor Tennyson possessed—the eye, if not the hand, of a consummate landscape painter, a torrent of ready eloquence on every imaginable topic, a fierce and desperate courage that feared neither man nor devil, neither failure nor ridicule, and above all things an exquisite tenderness that is akin to St. Francis or St. Vincent de Paul.'

'Tenderness!' chuckled the young painter; 'why, I find him at times perfectly ferocious. Did he not call London—London, one of the finest cities in Europe: the home of Chaucer and Milton, of Johnson and Carlyle, of Flaxman and of Turner—"that great foul city, rattling, growling, smoking, stinking, a ghastly heap of fermenting brick-work, pouring out poison at every pore"? And "goose," "monkey," and "infidel" are the choice terms with which he belabours eminent thinkers from whom he differs. I doubt if English literature can furnish a vocabulary of vituperation richer than that of your three hundred volumes on the principles of Eternal Beauty.'

'Ah, well,' said the other, 'you score there, I admit. He has caught from Thomas Carlyle, and perhaps from the Prophet Jeremiah, whom I dare say he reads with his morning prayers, a sad trick of flinging about hard words to ease his soul. It is a trick, which curiously enough is a peculiar snare to the devout. They seem

to think, that because the major and the minor prophets were commissioned to use very strong language indeed, because St. Peter and St. Paul were not afraid to speak out, and even a greater than the apostles had to speak very plainly to the scribes and Pharisees, they also ought to deal out the greater damnation, the unquenchable fire and the undying worm, to those who remain impenitent and unconverted. It is a foible of religious men, but we need not make too much of it. It springs, we know, out of real Christian charity, and a burning zeal to bring us all to heaven at last.'

'Not from any wish to see us grilling?' said the painter.

'The strong language of scorn and disgust into which John Ruskin is moved,' said the Professor, 'is a very different thing from the expression of a soured and irritable soul. Johnson, Byron, and Carlyle were good haters; their language of wrath was downright enmity to societies, parties, and persons. Burke, Shelley, and Ruskin fall at times into a frenzy of denunciation, because institutions, habits, and ideas fill them with horror and fear. They give way to ungovernable passion—not seldom to unreasonable passion; but we see that it is far more because they love the good, rather than that they hate the bad: they *fear* far more than they *hate*; and they *exhort* far more than they *despise*. Assailed, ridiculed, thwarted, as Ruskin has been for these fifty years, he has never (in full health and of cool purpose) said an unkind word of living man, nor an unjust word of a dead man. It is indeed his feminine gentleness of nature, rather his childlike simplicity of affection, which has cost him so much in this hard world of struggle and stress. And he is far more often accused of *enfantillage* than of ferocity.'

'Well,' said the painter, 'it is not very difficult to combine both.'

'I am not much given to *enfantillage* myself,' replied the other, 'and, much as I love children, I prefer them at home rather than exhibiting their gambols in public. Ruskin, for a social reformer, has treated us to too much of the children of nature. We have been overdone with the Kate Greenaway types of innocence; and the regenerator of human society must not preach too exclusively *virginibus puerisque*, or this impatient generation will not take him seriously. But for all that, when I see the author of *Modern Painters* and the *Stones of Venice*, the man who has exhausted almost all that Europe contains of the beautiful, who has thought and spoken of almost every phase of human life, and has entered so deeply into the highest mysteries of the greatest poets—when I see him surrounding himself in his old age with lads and lasses, schoolgirls and workmen, teaching them the elements of science and art, reading to them poems and tales, arranging for them games and holidays, ornaments and dresses, lavishing on these young people his genius and his wealth, his fame and his future—I confess my memory goes back instinctively to a fresco I saw in Italy years ago—was it Luini's?—wherein the Master sat in a crowd of children and forbade them to be removed, saying that of such is the kingdom of heaven.'

'Quite so,' said the painter; 'he likes to hide things from the wise and prudent, and to reveal them to babes.'

But this last sneer was rather too much for the patience of the older man. 'My dear young friend,' said he, 'if you go on like this, you will make me think that the Paris studios have taught you young Raphaels not only to fill your paint-brushes with mud, but to

take up mud into your souls. Here is a man who, labouring for fifty years, has scattered broadcast a thousand fine ideas to all who practise the arts, and all who care for art. He has roused in the cultured world an interest in things of art, such as a legion of painters and ten Royal Academies could never have done. He has poured out a torrent of thoughts, some right, some wrong, but such as have raised the level of art into a new world, which have adorned English literature for centuries, and have inspired the English race for generations; he has cast his bread upon the waste and muddy waters with a lavish hand, and has not waited to find it again, though it has been the seed of abundant harvests to others; he has conferred nobility on the profession that you are seeking to enter, and this is but a tithe of his whole work and achievement; and now, because you, and a dozen more like you, who intend to revolutionise art with your brush or your pen, pronounce the "Oxford graduate" to be obsolete in brushwork, and fanatical in religion, you have not patience enough to read his books, nor generosity enough to own your debt.'

'We should have done both, I am sure,' cried the painter, with a slight flush of irritation that professed to do duty for a blush, 'if the "Oxford graduate" had only stuck to pictures; but when he broke out into mineralogy and road-making, frocks for little girls and the theory of money, and preached sermons upon miracles and prayer, we poor laymen, who had much ado to cover a canvas in workmanlike style, found that life was too short for art so portentously long, and we saw more true *chic* in old Bourbeux's *technique* than in all the sermons to be found in the Bible of Amiens.'

'There is more than you suspect in what you say,'

said the elder man, 'and you are coming to the true issue after all. For twenty years John Ruskin battled alone and almost unrecognised by the official world of art, and by the time he was forty he had practically won the fight. Turner and modern landscape had been vindicated. For Turner he did very much what Carlyle did for Cromwell. Alone with own right hand he had made the world recognise one of its most splendid geniuses, who had been shamefully neglected and absurdly misunderstood. By the time that he was turned of forty—say roughly in 1860—John Ruskin's three great works were completed, and were rapidly conquering the English world. In England, no man is ever recognised until he is well over middle age. But, had Ruskin written no more, or written and spoken exclusively on art, he would by this time have lived into such a position of acknowledged mastership as Tennyson enjoyed in poetry and Darwin in science. But in 1860 he burst into political economy, with an attack on the entire army of economists in a small but fierce and uncompromising set of essays. He was labelled a Socialist, a madman, an anarchist, and was overwhelmed with ridicule and abuse. The advance of Darwinism seemed to drive him to a frenzy. He retaliated by devoting himself to social and moral exhortations, and ended by founding a Guild to re-form and re-christianise England. British society can overlook murder, adultery, or swindling—it never for-gives the preaching of a new gospel. The Guild of St. George was relegated to the category of Sande-manians, Jumpers, and Peculiar People. The painters, the architects, and the *bric-à-brac* experts discovered that there were many things Ruskin did not know, and some things in which he was wrong. And *Fors*

Clavigera was left to æsthetic curates, their girl admirers, and gushing undergraduates. Under the storm of contempt and neglect his health gave way. But there was even worse. He denounced all taking of interest on capital to be flat usury, and the receipt of dividends to be a shame and a sin. Nay, he flung away a large fortune in obedience to his principle. That was too much for the British public, and it is only a wonder that he was suffered to be at large.'

'Why, you don't agree that usury is sin, do you, and that the receipt of dividends on your capital is worse than theft?' said the painter.

'I am certain that usury (if it means payment for the temporary use of capital) is the material basis of civilised communities. So far as usury means such payment, freely made by rational persons treating on equal terms, not only is it not sin, but it is a prime element of society. All that Ruskin tells us to the contrary—I say it with reverence—is, to my mind, mere hallucination. The sixty-eighth letter in *Fors* has always appeared to me (lucid, eloquent, and beautiful as it may be) to be incredible perversity of mind. But I take it to be a piece of sheer religious monomania. Perhaps it is the literal acceptance of the words of Scripture. But, if it be so, the literal adoption of Scripture would lead to a frightful chaos in human society, and John Ruskin must be the only Christian since the days of Simon Stylites, or, at any rate, of the Fifth Monarchy men in our revolution. Cromwell was a good Christian and a sincere Puritan, but he had the good sense to see that the rule of the literal saints would be almost as bad as the rule of the arrant devils, and he sent the godly parliament about its business.'

'And can you continue to put any trust in a man who sets up to reform society with such a bee in his bonnet—a bee?—why, it is a whole nest of hornets.'

'It has no doubt ruined his influence, and from that hour the great public has thrust his teaching aside, even, I fear, on matters of art. But as to admitting that nothing which Ruskin can say after that can be worth attention, I can remember more than one atrocious paradox into which Carlyle descended; I remember the monomania of Herbert Spencer about the individual; and when I call to mind all the rabid things, the wicked things, the inhuman things, to which good and great men have been driven by faith in the Papacy and the Catholic Church, faith in Calvinism, faith in Communism, faith in Spiritualism—when I think of dying men dragging themselves to Lourdes, generous men turning assassins, and tender mothers adoring the divine judgment that consigns their children to hell-fire—when I reflect on all the folly and wickedness that has stricken men *gravi sub religione*, as Lucretius has it, I come to understand how a noble spirit and a fine brain has tortured itself into so monstrous a paradox.'

'And the Guild of St. George,' said the painter, 'do you go in for that?'

'The Guild of St. George was an heroic piece of Quixotism, the inherent beauty and goodness of which are not to be judged by its practical incoherence. Do you young fellows ever reflect on this? Here is the greatest living master of the English tongue, one of the most splendid lights of our noble literature, one to whom a dozen paths of ambition and power lay open, who had everything that could be offered by genius, fame, wealth, social popularity, and intense

sensitiveness to all lovely things; and this man, after thirty years of untiring labour, devotes himself to train, teach, delight, and inspire a band of young men, girls, workmen, children—all who choose to come around him. He lavishes the whole of his fortune on them; he brings to their door his treasures of art—science, literature, and poetry; he founds and endows museums; he offers these costly and precious collections to the people; he wears out his life in teaching them the elements of art, the elements of manufactures, the elements of science; he shows workmen how to work, girls how to draw, to sing, to play; he gives up to them his wealth, his genius, his peace, his whole life. He is not content with writing books in his study, with enjoying art at home or abroad: he must carry his message into the streets. He gives himself up—not to write down beautiful thoughts: he seeks to build up a beautiful world.'

'And makes a mess of it,' said the painter bitterly.

'Yes, he has made a mess of it,' groaned the other with a deep sigh, talking to himself, and no longer caring to reply to the interruptions of his smart young friend, 'but to fail in so beautiful a work is worth the writing of many beautiful books. We honour the men who devote their lives to thought, to science, to poetry; and we cannot honour too freely and heartily those like Carlyle or Darwin, Spencer or Tennyson, whose lives are their books, whose books are their lives. Carlyle and Spencer have talked most passionately, and often most wisely, about the regeneration of modern society, the reformation of our social ideals. They have done their best in the seclusion of their own libraries. They have lived laborious, strenuous, silent lives, but they never stirred one finger to form such a life for others

as they imagined, never gave one practical lesson to a fellow-man, nor founded any kind of association for mutual help and enlightenment. No one blames them, they had other cares: it was not their task to serve tables or to minister to the blind and the halt. It *was* the task of Ruskin. He, who has written more books than any three of our leading thinkers, has, in addition to this vast literary production, toiled like a curate or missionary in some crowded parish: lecturing, preaching, instructing, and counselling the poorest and the most ignorant who sought him; caring for their bodies, their spirits, their minds, their souls; finding them work which they could enjoy, giving them books that they could read; burning to make them Christians, gentlemen, Englishmen. The first life of John Ruskin was the life of a consummate teacher of art and master of style, the second life was the life of priest and evangelist.'

'But what if he had hold of the wrong gospel?' said the painter.

'He had hold of the Gospel that God-fearing, Bible-reading Englishmen *profess* to have hold of! He simply set himself to carry out literally into practical life some of the things that ordinary men and women profess to observe in church on Sundays. He took his Bible and acted on it, come what may, and Bible Christians now mock at him for so doing.'

'Was he consistent even in that?' said the painter. 'I noticed that you were careful to say "some of the things."'

'It is physically impossible to be consistent with such a decalogue; and that is the mischief of it. The literalists, when it comes to practice, always do pick and choose. Some who grind the poor decline an oath

in a court of justice; the rebellious flagellants scourged themselves; the fanatical hermits of the Thebaid preferred to live like the foxes; a great many Christians take no thought for the morrow; some very few Christians take no thought for their raiment; and religious maniacs have been known to pluck out the right eye and to cut off the right hand. All literalists pick their own verses or chapters, and explain away the rest. And Ruskin has explained away as much as any. In a case like this, the real credit is to be wisely inconsistent and to know when to repudiate consistency.'

'Which Ruskin knows no more than does Leon Tolstoi!' said the painter.

'Ah, well,' said the other, 'the Ruskins and the Tolstois, these evangelical zealots, must go their own way, and deliver their souls of their own gospel. We can all see their intense earnestness and single-hearted devotion; and as the emperor who claimed to be "above grammar" when he mangled his imperial tongue, so they are "above logic" when they are preaching to the multitude again the world-old Sermon on the Mount. It is all very well for you and for me to ask for a more common-sense creed, and to feel what a ghastly mess the primitive Christians would make of the world if they had their way. But it is too bad that the professing Christians who read their Bibles on Sundays, and pretend to believe in it as the Word of God, should laugh to scorn a Christian poet who does in his soul accept it as God's own truth, and resolutely takes it as the law of his life. The Bible undoubtedly does say, "Thou shalt not give thy money upon usury: I am the Lord thy God"; and John Ruskin says, "I will not give my money upon usury," whereat the whole Christian world roars out in mockery and wrath, falls

upon him as the Jews on Paul as "a pestilent fellow," a "mover of sedition," and calls out in a loud voice, like Festus to Paul, "John! thou art beside thyself: much learning doth make thee mad."'

'That was a good bit that I saw the other day in the *Bible of Amiens*, that "phases of mental disease are the necessary consequence of exaggerated and independent emotion,"' said the painter.

'Yes,' said the other, 'there are, as he says, "morbid states of intellect which are extremities of noble passion"; but go on with that beautiful passage about the mountain anchorites of Arabia and Palestine. "We cannot estimate the solemnising or reproving power of their examples on the less zealous Christian world." We have a fine lesson there. The age is past for St. Anthonys and St. Jeromes, and even for St. Bruno or St. Francis of Assisi. But when a man does come forth, who, in the thirteenth century, would assuredly have donned the cowl and preached barefoot, we cannot estimate the solemnising and reproving power of his example, even when he makes us smile. At any rate, we need not run after him like the children after Elisha, bawling out, "Go up, thou bald head!"'

'Go to, old man,' said the painter, with a loud laugh, 'you are like one of the she-bears that came out of the wood and tare forty and two children of them, and so avenged the prophet.'

'We all know who can quote Scripture for his own purpose,' said the Professor. 'I am not an authority upon Scripture nor the merits of a sermon. But I am sure of this, that the whole bench of bishops and the united dignitaries of the Established Church preach to-day no sermons which can match the sermons to be gathered out of the *Bibliotheca Ruskiniana* for

Gospel simplicity and purity, for Christlike gentleness and lovingness, and for directness of moral energy.'

'Along with extravagances that make the whole sermon a farce,' said the painter.

'Along with the extremities of noble passion, I prefer to say,' replied the other. 'I should like to hear the Archbishop of Canterbury preaching a sermon to the House of Lords on a text which I read from Ruskin this very morning. It is from *Unto this Last*, and I put the little book in my pocket when we started for our walk. Here it is: "In a community regulated only by laws of demand and supply, but protected from open violence, the persons who become rich are, generally speaking, industrious, resolute, proud, covetous, prompt, methodical, sensible, unimaginative, insensitive, and ignorant. The persons who remain poor are the entirely foolish, the entirely wise, the idle, the reckless, the humble, the thoughtful, the dull, the imaginative, the sensitive, the well-informed, the improvident, the irregularly and impulsively wicked, the clumsy knave, the open thief, and the entirely merciful, just, and godly person." That little sentence, the keynote of that little book, contains an entire gospel in itself, a complete manual of Political Economy, and a treatise on Ethics. A thousand sermons might be preached upon it, but they will hardly be preached by our courtly prelates and cultured divines.'

'What on earth did a man mean in a magazine the other day who said that Ruskin's *Unto this Last* was the most original and creative work in English literature since *Sartor Resartus*? You don't believe in that nonsense, do you?' said the painter.

'It struck me at the time as rather a strange remark,' said the Professor, 'and I took down the book to-day

to give it another reading. Certainly I cannot agree with all the startling and trenchant assertions of the book. Ruskin himself declares it, *more suo*, to be "the best, that is to say, the truest, rightest-worded, and most serviceable thing he had ever written," and the last essay of the four to be the best he shall ever write. He "rests satisfied with the work, though with nothing else that he has done"—words, I admit, characteristic of his magnificent faith in his mission, but which at least are justified by the result, in their effect upon English thought.'

'Justified by the result?' cried the painter. 'Do you mean that he has converted the British public to Socialism?'

'No! nor did *Sartor Resartus* convert the British public, which hardly understood a quarter of the Philosophy of Clothes, according to the Apostle of Chelsea. But *Sartor*, which appeared when Ruskin was a lad, has profoundly affected the tone of Englishmen in the last two generations, and Ruskin was himself the most notable product of the Carlyle creed. Carlyle, in his apocalyptic way, anathematised the "dismal science," and consigned to Tophet the political economists. But it was the eloquence of Ruskin—the wit, the ingenuity, the lyrical passion and apostolic faith in his mission—which was wanted. Carlyle had neither the patience nor the analytic and logical precision required to deal methodically with the terms and dogmas of the older plutonomists. Maurice had poured out eloquent sermons, and Kingsley had given voice in some passionate poetry and fiction; but no one before Ruskin had set himself to test by careful analysis "the idea that an advantageous code of social action may be determined irrespectively of the influence

of social affection." His essays were begun in 1860 and it would not be easy to find any serious book in that sense of an earlier date than this.'

'And so *Unto this Last* annihilated Political Economy?' said the painter.

'I hope not,' replied his friend, 'but it put into a form more picturesque and incisive than ever before the revolt from that cynical pedantry into which the so-called Political Economy was tending to degenerate. The brutal, ignorant, and inhuman language which was current about capital and labour, workmen and trades-unions, is heard no longer. The old plutonomy is a thing of the past. And no man has done more to expose it than the author of *Unto this Last.*'

'And founded modern Socialism, I suppose,' said the painter.

'Certainly not! for in many things Ruskin is in direct conflict with Socialism. He is all for kings, captains of industry, and powers that be in Church and State. But in so far as the Sermon on the Mount savours of Socialism, so far as St. Bernard of Clairvaux and St. Francis of Assisi fostered socialist tendencies—and it is certain that neither Gospel nor friars encouraged a millennium of capital and unlimited competition—so far Ruskin is really the apostle of a sort of moral and religious Socialism.'

'Why,' said the painter, 'I thought that was the term that some of these Positivists give to the Gospel according to Comte.'

'I believe it is,' said the other, 'and the curious thing is, that Ruskin and Comte are constantly saying the same thing, though Ruskin has often quite furiously denounced Comte, who was dead before *Modern Painters* was finished. No man ever exceeded Comte

in the homage he offered to the thirteenth-century chiefs, mystics, and thinkers, to mediæval architecture, poetry, legends, and music, to Dante and St. Francis, to the Feudal kings, chiefs, and crusaders. It was Comte who treated education as a discipline in morality and energy as well as in science, who repudiated competition, plutonomy, the race for wealth; it is he who makes Scott the last great poet of the world, and has given philosophy to a multitude of things which Ruskin has adorned with poetry and colour.'

'Ruskin would not be pleased with that comparison,' said the painter.

'Indeed no!' said the other, 'but it is a new proof of the truth that every really religious scheme of the world and of man has certain analogies and common principles, whether the scheme be human and scientific, or transcendental and mystical, provided the mind of the schemer be clear and bold, and the soul of him generous and sincere.'

'So John Ruskin, of *Fors Clavigera* and *Sesame and Lilies*, is a philosopher after all!' said the painter.

'Ah, no!' said the other, 'philosophy is indeed the last thing he can claim. One who loves to range over the whole field of human ideas, sympathies, and activities—and that without system or method, without principles to start from, or logical guide—nay, one who vehemently rejects all systems, philosophers, teachers, and antecedent knowledge of any kind, except the Bible and a few poets, certain pictures, some buildings, and a good many flowers, shells, and crystals—such a one may give us a whole world of beautiful thoughts and inspiring lessons, but nothing like philosophy, and least of all anything that can be called a rule of life.'

'So you are not going to enroll in the new Carthu-

sians of the Guild of St. George,' said the painter, 'though you seem to look on its founder as a sort of glorified Hot-Gospeller in the midst of an unfeeling world.'

'I look on him,' rejoined his friend, 'as having a soul as sensitive to all forms of beauty as Shelley, one whose gift of prose speech reminds us of what Villani said of Dante, that "he had the most exquisite style that the language ever produced"—who has used this gift with unfaltering courage and perseverance to irradiate with ennobling ideas the whole field of morality, education, industry, art, poetry, and religion.'

'And we need not mind all that we find perverse and extravagant?' said the painter.

'Some day, perhaps,' said the other, 'a future generation will be able to take up these outpourings of the spirit, not to criticise and condemn what they find there to dispute or to laugh at, but in the way in which sensible men read Plato's *Republic*, or the book of Ezekiel, or Dante's *New Life*, to enjoy the melody of the language, the inspiring poetry, and their apocalyptic visions, without being disturbed in the least by all that is mystical, fantastical, impossible in the ideal of humanity they present.'

'Well,' said the painter, 'I will try them in that way, if I am not required to go to school with St. George. But how dark it has become whilst we have been talking! We shall hardly find our path down through the grove of yews.'

'Yes,' said the other, 'when I see how cold, dark, and monotonous the heaven has become, which an hour ago was aflame with fantastic forms of unimaginable beauty, I cannot help thinking of the peaceful sunset into which that fiery imagination has passed, so calmly

and silently awaiting the night in which no man can work. We can give no meaning in words to all the fitful shapes which just now we watched peopling the sky, nor can we read the messages with which those cloud-prophets seemed to glow. A gorgeous sky at sunset teaches neither science nor philosophy. But our spirits are attuned and our thoughts grow solemn and humane, albeit we know not why. We have seen the last ray of a glorious day.

'"His memory long will live alone
In all our hearts, as mournful light
That broods above the fallen sun,
And dwells in heaven half the night."'[1]

So saying, the two men picked their footsteps down the steep path in silence and apart.

[1] Tennyson, 'Lines to J. S.'

CHAPTER IV

RUSKIN'S EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY[1]

(*Feb.* 8, 1819—1899)

TO-DAY the last survivor of the great writers in the first half of the reign attains the patriarchal age of fourscore years. John Ruskin keeps his eightieth birthday. It is sixty years since he published his first piece—the prize poem of 1839—a student's exercise, it is true, but one that was soon followed by the first decisive work of the 'Oxford graduate.' For fifty years—from the early 'Newdigate' down to the last memoir in *Præterita*—a torrent of thought, fancy, and exhortation continued to pour forth from the fiery spirit endowed with the eye of the hawk. And now for ten years the old man eloquent has kept silence even from good words, resting in profound calm amongst those he loves, softly meditating on the exquisite things of nature and of art that surround him; his manifold work ended, his long life crowned and awaiting its final consecration: at peace with God and man.

We may all of us recall to-day with love and gratitude the enormous mass of stirring thoughts and melodious speech about a thousand things, divine and human, beautiful and good, which for a whole half-century the author of *Modern Painters* has given to

[1] By kind permission of proprietors of the *Daily Chronicle*.

the world. We think of the immense range of these thoughts. They cover every phase of nature, every type of art, of history, society, economics, religion; the past and the future; all rules of human duty, whether personal or social, domestic or national. He had 'understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore,' . . . 'and his fame was in all nations round about.' He spake to us of trees, from the cedar of Lebanon unto the hyssop on the wall; he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. He has put new beauty for us into the sky and the clouds and the rainbow, into the seas at rest or in storm, into the mountains and into the lakes, into flowers and the grass, into crystals and gems, into the mightiest ruins of past ages, and into the humblest rose upon a cottage wall. He has done for the Alps and the cathedrals of Italy and France, for Venice and Florence, what Byron did for Greece. We look on them all now with new and more searching eyes. Whole schools of art, entire ages of old workmanship, the very soul of the Middle Age, have been revealed with a new inspiration, and transfigured in a more mysterious light. Poetry, Greek sculpture, mediæval worship, commercial morality, the training of the young, the nobility of industry, the purity of the home—a thousand things that make up the joy and soundness of human life have been irradiated by the flashing search-light of one ardent soul. Irradiated, let us say, as this dazzling ray shot round the horizon, glancing from heaven to earth, and touching the gloom with fire. We need not, even to-day, be tempted from truth, or pretend that the light is permanent or complete. It has long ceased to flash round the welkin, and its very scintillations have disturbed

our true vision. But we remember still its dazzling power and its revelation of things that our own eyes had not seen.

What we especially love to dwell on to-day is this: that in all this unrivalled volume of printed thoughts, in this encyclopædic range of topic by this most voluminous and most versatile of modern writers (may we not say of all English writers?), there is not one line that is base, or coarse, or frivolous; not a sentence that was framed in envy, malice, wantonness, or cruelty; not one piece that was written to win money or popularity or promotion; not a line composed for any selfish end or in any trivial mood. Think what we may of this enormous library of print, we know that every word of it was put forth of set purpose without any hidden aim, utterly without fear, and wholly without guile; to make the world a little better, to guide, inspire, and teach men, come what might, scoff as they would, turn from him as they chose, though they left him alone, a broken old man crying in the wilderness, with none to hear or to care. They might think it all utterly vain; we may think much of it was in vain: but it was always the very heart's blood of a rare genius and a noble soul.

Assuredly, this is not the day on which any man would criticise this mass of product or try to weigh its permanent result. Let to-day be given up to enjoyment and honour of what we have received from one 'who uttered nothing base.' A long life of battle, and strain, and affliction is ending now in a serene sunset and in recognised triumph. The world too often acknowledges its true teachers and prophets only when it begins to build them some belated tomb. This, at any rate, we will not suffer to be done to John

Ruskin. He has lived down all mockery and all strife. He has heard ribaldry die down, and has witnessed the harvest gathering in from a thousand fields beyond the acres which he ploughed and sowed. Europe has acknowledged him as a master of the beautiful and as the soul of our modern English art. Many of the fields where he drove his ploughshare most fiercely and assiduously are barren to-day. Much of the seed he scattered with such fervid hopes has fallen on stony ground. But his spirit has passed far wider than he ever knew or conceived; and his words, flung to the winds, have borne fruit a hundredfold in land that he never thought of or designed to reach.

A truce then, for to-day at least, to all criticism and all belittling of a most fertile genius. It befalls such men whose passionate originality makes them by nature Apostles and Gospellers—*Athanasios contra mundum*—that they are injured by the small and narrow sect which inevitably gathers round them like the lichen on a great rock. These exaggerate errors, stimulate foibles, and proclaim infallibility in spite of disclaimers. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum*: the great public can honour an original thinker without swearing obedience to his every word; they acknowledge the mission of the evangelist, whilst they decline to be baptized into his flock. I can speak the more freely myself, inasmuch as I am one of those outcasts on whom the club of *Fors Clavigera* has smitten a shrewd blow; whom it would smite again, and not at all in play, if her club were not hung up in the temple of reconciliation and peace, if she had not long renounced all thought of strife and sentence upon evil men.

Frankly, though I am one of the last men who could aspire to be enrolled in the company of St. George,

and may be counted indeed as sprung from the blood of the Dragon whom St. George has to slay, I am filled with thoughts that this eightieth birthday inspires. This long life, which spans across four reigns, began in a time of suffering to our people, grossness, vulgarity, and reaction. The great writers of the early days of our queen are all gone—Macaulay and Carlyle, Dickens and Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, Tennyson and Browning. With them, too, are gone Millais and Leighton, Burne-Jones and Morris—Mill and Darwin, Froude and Freeman — Newman and Maurice—Symonds and Matthew Arnold—all are gone and in part even forgotten. Of the men eminent in the middle of this century, there remain, Spencer in philosophy, in literature Ruskin. And in literature, surely, John Ruskin can hold his own with them all.

But it is not of literary power that I am chiefly thinking to-day, though I hold that his gift in the speech of prose has never been surpassed in our tongue. I prefer to dwell in thought on the infinite stimulus to a pure judgment of nature and of life which the 'Oxford graduate' has given us.

His teaching about art has always been a sort of preface to his teaching of honesty, purity, discipline, and religion. If he inherited great wealth, it was only to fling it broadcast to the public or the poor. When he had gathered in priceless treasures, he gave them away with reckless munificence. When he drank in things of beauty in distant lands, it was not to revel in them himself, but to share his joy in them with all comers. No literary gains of modern times have equalled his. But he collected such profits that he might found museums, enrich public galleries, and support poor students. He was no literary recluse or

fastidious amateur whose treasures were kept for a few favoured eyes, till dispersed at Christie's. He worked at model trades like a managing clerk, and taught beginners like a country usher. What do we care for mistakes, failures, blunders — even follies? Were Christ, or Bouddha, or St. Francis such thorough men of business, such models of wisdom? Ruskin and good business—Ruskin and common-sense—take different paths. He is content to follow his own genius in pursuit of Beauty and the Good of human life through thorny and stony ways, and even where few dare to follow. A great French writer, whose book is entitled *Ruskin and the Religion of Beauty*, tells us that Ruskin discusses morality, industry, and religion in order to lead us up to a higher sense of art. It would be more true to say that John Ruskin began by preaching to us a higher sense of art, in order to lead us up to a truer understanding of morality, industry, religion, and humanity.

CHAPTER V

MATTHEW ARNOLD

THE very name of Matthew Arnold calls up to memory a set of apt phrases and proverbial labels which have passed into our current literature, and are most happily redolent of his own peculiar turn of thought. How could modern criticism be carried on were it forbidden to speak of 'culture,' of 'urbanity,' of 'Philistinism,' of 'distinction,' of 'the *note* of provinciality,' of 'the great style'? What a convenient shorthand is it to refer to 'Barbarians,' to 'the young lions of the Press,' to 'Bottles,' to 'Arminius,' to 'the Zeit-Geist'—and all the personal and impersonal objects of our great critic's genial contempt!

It is true that our young lions (whose feeding-time appears to be our breakfast-hour) have roared themselves almost hoarse over some of these sayings and nicknames, and even the 'note of provinciality' has become a little provincial. But how many of these pregnant phrases have been added to the debates of philosophy and even of religion! 'The stream of tendency that makes for righteousness,' 'sweetness and light'—not wholly in Swift's sense, and assuredly not in Swift's temper either of spirit or of brain—'sweet reasonableness,' '*das Gemeine*,' the '*Aberglaube*,' are more than mere labels or phrases: they are ideas, gospels—at least, aphorisms. The judicious reader

may recall the rest of these epigrams for himself, for to set forth any copious catalogue of them would be to indite a somewhat leonine essay oneself. Lord Beaconsfield, himself so great a master of memorable and prolific phrases, with admirable insight recognised this rare gift of our Arminius, and he very justly said that it was a 'great thing to do — a great achievement.'

Now this gift of sending forth to ring through a whole generation a phrase which immediately passes into a proverb, which stamps a movement or a set of persons with a distinctive cognomen, or condenses a mode of judging them into a portable aphorism—this is a very rare power, and one peculiarly rare amongst Englishmen. Carlyle had it, Disraeli had it, but how few others amongst our contemporaries! Arnold's current phrases still in circulation are more numerous than those of Disraeli, and are more simple and apt than Carlyle's. These *ἔπεα πτερόεντα* fly through the speech of cultivated men, pass current in the market-place; they are generative, efficient, and issue into act. They may be right or wrong, but at any rate they do their work: they teach, they guide, possibly may mislead, but they are alive. It was noteworthy, and most significant, how many of these familiar phrases of Arnold's were Greek. He was never tired of recommending to us the charms of 'Hellenism,' of *εὐφυΐα*, of *epieikeia*, the supremacy of Homer, 'the classical spirit.' He loved to present himself to us as *εὐφυής*, as *ἐπιεικής*, as *καλοκἀγαθός*; he had been sprinkled with some of the Attic salt of Lucian, he was imbued with the classical genius—and never so much as in his poems.

THE POET

His poetry had the classical spirit in a very peculiar and rare degree; and we can have little doubt now, when so much of Arnold's prose work in criticism has been accepted as standard opinion, and so much of his prose work in controversy has lost its interest and savour, that it is his poetry which will be longest remembered, and there his finest vein was reached. It may be said that no poet in the roll of our literature, unless it be Milton, has been so essentially saturated to the very bone with the classical genius. And I say this without forgetting *Œnone*, or the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, or the *Prometheus Unbound*, or *Atalanta in Calydon*; for I am thinking of the entire compass of all the productions of these poets, who are very often romantic and fantastic. But we can find hardly a single poem of Arnold's that is far from the classical idea.

His poetry, however, is 'classical' only in a general sense, not that all of it is imitative of ancient models or has any affectation of archaism. It is essentially modern in thought, and has all that fetishistic worship of natural objects which is the true note of our Wordsworthian school. But Arnold is 'classical' in the serene self-command, the harmony of tone, the measured fitness, the sweet reasonableness of his verse. This balance, this lucidity, this Virgilian dignity and grace, may be said to be unfailing. Whatever be its shortcomings and its limitations, Arnold's poetry maintains this unerring urbanity of form. There is no thunder, no rant, no discord, no honey, no intoxication of mysticism or crash of battle in him. Our poet's eye doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven; but it is

never caught 'in a fine frenzy rolling.' It is in this sense that Arnold is classical, that he has, and has uniformly and by instinct, some touch of that 'liquid clearness of an Ionian sky' which he felt in Homer. Not but what he is, in thought and by suggestion, one of the most truly modern, the most frankly contemporary, of all our poets.

It is no doubt owing to this constant appeal of his to modern thought, and in great degree to the best and most serious modern thought, that Arnold's poetry is welcomed by a somewhat special audience. But for that very reason it is almost certain to gain a wider audience, and to grow in popularity and influence. His own prose has perhaps not a little retarded the acceptance of his verse. The prose is of far greater bulk than his verse: it deals with many burning questions, especially those of current politics and theological controversies; and it supplies whole menageries of young lions with perennial bones of contention and succulent morsels wherewith to lick their lips. How could the indolent, or even the industrious reviewer, tear himself from the delight of sucking in 'the three Lord Shaftesburys'—or it may be from spitting them forth with indignation — in order to meditate with Empedocles or Thyrsis in verses which are at once 'sober, steadfast, and demure'?

The full acceptance of Arnold's poetry has yet to come. And in order that it may come in our time, we should be careful not to over-praise him, not to credit him with qualities that he never had. His peculiar distinction is his unfailing level of thoughtfulness, of culture, and of balance. Almost alone amongst our poets since Milton, Arnold is never incoherent, spasmodic, careless, washy, or *banal.* He never flies up into

a region where the sun melts his wings; he strikes no discords, and he never tries a mood for which he has no gift. He has more general insight into the intellectual world of our age, and he sees into it more deeply and more surely, than any contemporary poet. He has a trained thirst for nature; but his worship of nature never weakens his reverence of man, and his brooding over man's destiny. On the other hand, he has little passion, small measure of dramatic sense, but a moderate gift of movement or of colour, and—what is perhaps a more serious want—no sure ear for melody and music.

As poet, Arnold belongs to an order very rare with us, in which Greece was singularly rich—the order of *gnomic* poets, who condensed in metrical aphorisms their thoughts on human destiny and the moral problems of life. The type is found in the extant fragments of Solon, of Xenophanes, and above all of Theognis. The famous maxim of Solon—*μηδὲν ἄγαν* (nothing overdone)—might serve as a maxim for Arnold. But of all the gnomic poets of Greece, the one with whom Arnold has most affinity is Theognis. Let us compare the one hundred and eight fragments of Theognis, as they are paraphrased by J. Hookham Frere, with the *Collected Poems* of Arnold, and the analogy will strike us at once: the stoical resolution, the disdain of vulgarity, the aversion from civic brawls, the aloofness from the rudeness of the populace and the coarseness of ostentatious wealth. The seventeenth fragment of Frere might serve as a motto for Arnold's poems and for Arnold's temper—

> 'I walk by rule and measure, and incline
> To neither side, but take an even line;
> Fix'd in a single purpose and design.

With learning's happy gifts to celebrate,
To civilise and dignify the State;
Not leaguing with the discontented crew,
Nor with the proud and arbitrary few.'

This is the very keynote of so many poems, of *Culture and Anarchy*, of 'sweetness and light,' of *epieikeia*; it is the tone of the *euphues*, of the *τετράγωνος ἄνευ ψόγου*, of the 'wise and good.'

This intensely gnomic, meditative, and ethical vein in Arnold's poetry runs through the whole of his singularly equable work, from the earliest sonnets to the latest domestic elegies. His Muse, as he sings himself, is ever

Radiant, adorn'd outside; a hidden ground
Of thought and of austerity within.'

This deep undertone of thought and of austerity gives a uniform and somewhat melancholy colour to every line of his verse, not despairing, not pessimist, not querulous, but with a resolute and pensive insight into the mystery of life and of things, reminding us of those lovely tombs in the Cerameicus at Athens, of Hegeso and the rest, who in immortal calm and grace stand ever bidding to this fair earth a long and sweet farewell. Like other gnomic poets, Arnold is ever running into the tone of elegy; and he is quite at his best in elegy. Throughout the whole series of his poems it would be difficult to find any, even the shorter sonnets, which did not turn upon this pensive philosophy of life, unless we hold the few Narrative Poems to be without it. His mental food, he tells us, was found in Homer, Sophocles, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius; and his graver pieces sound like some echo of the

imperial *Meditations*, cast into the form of a Sophoclean chorus.

Of more than one hundred pieces, short or long, that Arnold has left, only a few here and there can be classed as poems of fancy, pure description, or frank surrender of the spirit to the sense of joy and of beauty. Whether he is walking in Hyde Park or lounging in Kensington Gardens, apostrophising a gipsy child, recalling old times in Rugby Chapel, mourning over a college friend, or a dead bird, or a pet dog, he always comes back to the dominant problems of human life. As he buries poor 'Geist,' he speculates on the future life of man; as he laments 'Matthias' dying in his cage, he moralises on the limits set to our human sympathy. With all his intense enjoyment of nature, and his acute observation of nature, it never ends there. One great lesson, he says, nature is ever teaching, it is blown in every wind: the harmony of labour and of peace—*ohne Hast, ohne Rast.* Every natural sight and sound has its moral warning; a yellow primrose is not a primrose to him and nothing more: it reveals the poet of the primrose. The ethical lesson of nature, which is the uniform burden of Arnold's poetry, has been definitely summed up by him in the sonnet to a preacher who talked loosely of our 'harmony with nature'—

> 'Know, man hath all which nature hath, but more,
> And in that *more* lie all his hopes of good.'

Not only is Arnold what Aristotle called ἠθικώτατος, a moralist in verse, but his moral philosophy of life and man is at once large, wise, and deep. He is abreast of the best modern thought, and he meets the great problems of destiny, and what is now called the

'foundations of belief,' like a philosopher, and not like a rhetorician, a sentimentalist, or a theologian. The essential doctrine of his verse is the spirit of his own favourite hero, Marcus Aurelius, having (at least in aspiration if not in performance) the same stoicism, dignity, patience, and gentleness, and no little of the same pensive and ineffectual resignation under insoluble problems. Not to institute any futile comparison of genius, it must be conceded that Arnold in his poetry dwells in a higher philosophic æther than any contemporary poet. He has a wider learning, a cooler brain, and a more masculine logic. It was not in vain that Arnold was so early inspired by echoes of Empedocles, to whom his earliest important poem was devoted, the philosopher-poet of early Greece, whom the Greeks called Homeric, and whose 'austere harmony' they valued so well. Arnold's sonnet on 'The Austerity of Poetry,' of which two lines have been cited above, is a mere amplification of this type of poetry as an idealised philosophy of nature and of life.

This concentration of poetry on ethics and even metaphysics involves very serious limitations and much loss of charm. The gnomic poets of Greece, though often cited for their maxims, were the least poetic of the Greek singers, and the least endowed with imagination. Aristotle calls Empedocles more 'the natural philosopher than the poet.' Solon indeed, with all his wisdom, can be as tedious as Wordsworth, and Theognis is usually prosaic. Arnold is never prosaic, and almost never tedious; but the didactic poet cannot possibly hold the attention of the groundlings for long. *Empedocles on Etna*, published at the age of thirty-one, still remains his most characteristic piece of any length, and it is in some ways his high-water mark of achieve-

ment. It has various moods, lyrical, didactic, dramatic —rhyme, blank verse, monologue, and song—it has his philosophy of life, his passion for nature, his enthusiasm for the undying memories of Greece. It is his typical poem; but the average reader finds its twelve hundred lines too long, too austere, too indecisive; and the poet himself withdrew it for years, from a sense of its monotony of doubt and sadness.

The high merit of Arnold's verse is the uniform level of fine, if austere, thought, embodied in clear, apt, graceful, measured form. He keeps a firm hand on his Pegasus, and is always lucid, self-possessed, dignified, with a voice perfectly attuned to the feeling and thought within him. He always knew exactly what he wished to say, and he always said it exactly. He is thus one of the most correct, one of the least faulty, of all our poets: as Racine was 'correct' and faultless,' as in the supreme degree was the eternal type of all that is correct and faultless in form—Sophocles himself.

As a poet, Arnold was indeed our *Matteo senza errore*, but to be faultless is not to be of the highest rank. And we must confess that in exuberance of fancy, in imagination, in glow and rush of life, in tumultuous passion, in dramatic pathos, Arnold cannot claim any high rank at all. He has given us indeed but little of the kind, and hardly enough to judge him. His charming farewell lines to his dead pets, the dogs, the canary, and the cat, are full of tenderness, quaint playfulness, grace, wit, worthy of Cowper. The *Forsaken Merman* and *Tristram and Iseult* have passages of delightful fancy and of exquisite pathos. If any one doubt if Arnold had a true imagination, apart from his gnomic moralities, let him consider the conclusion

of *The Church of Brou.* The gallant Duke of Savoy, killed in a boar hunt, is buried by his young widow in a magnificent tomb in the memorial Church of Brou, and so soon as the work is completed, the broken-hearted Duchess dies and is laid beside him underneath their marble effigies. The poet stands beside the majestic and lonely monument, and he breaks forth—

> ' So sleep, for ever sleep, O marble Pair!
> Or, if ye wake, let it be then, when fair
> On the carved western front a flood of light
> Streams from the setting sun, and colours bright
> Prophets, transfigured Saints, and Martyrs brave,
> In the vast western window of the nave ;
> And on the pavement round the Tomb there glints
> A chequer-work of glowing sapphire-tints,
> And amethyst, and ruby—then unclose
> Your eyelids on the stone where ye repose,
> And from your broider'd pillows lift your heads,
> And rise upon your cold white marble beds ;
> And, looking down on the warm rosy tints,
> Which chequer, at your feet, the illumined flints,
> Say : *What is this? we are in bliss—forgiven—*
> *Behold the pavement of the courts of Heaven!*
> Or let it be on autumn nights, when rain
> Doth rustlingly above your heads complain
> On the smooth leaden roof, and on the walls
> Shedding her pensive light at intervals
> The moon through the clere-story window shines,
> And the wind rushes through the mountain pines.
> Then, gazing up 'mid the dim pillars high,
> The foliaged marble forest where ye lie,
> *Hush*, ye will say, *it is eternity!*
> *This is the glimmering verge of Heaven*, *and these*
> *The columns of the heavenly palaces!*
> And, in the sweeping of the wind, your ear
> The passage of the Angels' wings will hear,
> And on the lichen-crusted leads above
> The rustle of the eternal rain of love.'

I have cited this beautiful passage as a specimen of Arnold's poetic gift, apart from his gnomic quality of lucid thought. It is not his usual vein, but it serves to test his powers as a mere singer. It has fancy, imagination, metrical grace, along with some penury of rhyme, perfection of tone. Has it the magic of the higher poetry, the ineffable music, the unforgotten phrase? No one has ever analysed 'the liquid diction,' 'the fluid movement' of great poetry so lucidly as Arnold himself. The fluid movement indeed he shows not seldom, especially in his blank verse. *Sohrab and Rustum*, a fine poem all through, if just a little academic, has some noble passages, some quite majestic lines and Homero-eid similes. But the magic of music, the unforgotten phrase, is not there. Arnold, who gave us in prose so many a memorable phrase, has left us in poetry hardly any such as fly upon the tongues of men, unless it be—'The weary Titan, staggering on to her goal,' or 'That sweet city with her dreaming spires.' These are fine, but it is not enough.

Undoubtedly, Arnold from the first continually broke forth into some really Miltonic lines. Of nature he cries out—

> 'Still do thy sleepless ministers move on,
> Their glorious tasks in silence perfecting.'

Or again, he says—

> 'Whereo'er the chariot wheels of life are roll'd
> In cloudy circles to eternity.'

In the *Scholar-Gipsy*, he says—

> 'Go, shepherd, and untie the wattled cotes!
> No longer leave thy wistful flock unfed.'

Arnold has at times the fluid movement, but only at moments and on occasions, and he has a pure and

highly trained sense of metrical rhythm. But he has not the yet finer and rarer sense of melodious music. We must even say more. He is insensitive to cacophonies that would have made Tennyson or Shelley 'gasp and stare.' No law of Apollo is more sacred than this: that he shall not attain the topmost crag of Parnassus who crams his mouth whilst singing with a handful of gritty consonants.

It is an ungracious task to point to the ugly features of poems that have unquestionably refined modulation and an exquisite polish. But where nature has withheld the ear for music, no labour and no art can supply the want. And I would ask those who fancy that modulation and polish are equivalent to music to repeat aloud these lines amongst many—

> 'The sandy spits, the shore-lock'd lakes.'
>
> 'Kept on after the grave, but not begun.'
>
> 'Couldst thou no better keep, O Abbey old!'
>
> 'The strange-scrawl'd rocks, the lonely sky.'
>
> 'From heaths starr'd with broom,
> And high rocks throw mildly
> On the blanch'd sands a gloom.'

These last three lines are from the *Forsaken Merman*, wherein Arnold perhaps came nearest to the echo of music and to pure fantasy. In the grand lines to Shakespeare, he writes—

> 'Self-school'd, self-scann'd, self-honour'd, self-secure.'

Here are seven sibilants, four 'selfs,' three 'sc,' and twenty-nine consonants against twelve vowels in one verse. It was not thus that Shakespeare himself wrote sonnets, as when he said—

> 'Full many a glorious morning have I seen
> Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye.'

It must be remembered that Arnold wrote but little verse, and most of it in early life; that he was not by profession a poet, that he was a hardworked inspector of schools all his days; and that his prose work far exceeds his verse. This separates him from all his contemporary rivals, and partly explains his stiffness in rhyming, his small product, and his lack of melody. Had he been able like Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne, to regard himself from first to last as a poet, to devote his whole life to poetry, to live the life 'of thought and of austerity within'—which he craved as poet, but did not achieve as a man—then he might have left us poems more varied, more fanciful, more musical, more joyous. By temperament and by training, he, who at birth 'was breathed on by the rural Pan,' was deprived of that fountain of delight that is essential to the highest poetry, the dithyrambic glow—the ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα—

'The countless dimples of the laughing seas'[1]

of perennial poetry. This perhaps, more than his want of passion, of dramatic power, of rapidity of action, limits the audience of Arnold as a poet. But those who thirst for the pure Castalian spring, inspired by sustained and lofty thoughts, who care for that σπουδαιότης—that 'high seriousness,' of which he spoke so much as the very essence of the best poetry—have long known that they find it in Matthew Arnold more than in any of his even greater contemporaries.

THE CRITIC

About Matthew Arnold as critic of literature it is needless to enlarge, for the simple reason that we have

[1] From an unpublished translation of *Prometheus* by E. H. Pember, Q.C.

all long ago agreed that he has no superior, indeed no rival. His judgments on our poets have passed into current opinion, and have ceased to be discussed or questioned. It is, perhaps, a grave loss to English literature that Arnold was not able, or perhaps never strove, to devote his whole life to the interpretation of our best poetry and prose, with the same systematic, laborious, concentrated energy which has placed Sainte-Beuve at the head of French critics. With his absorbing professional duties, his far from austere aloofness from the whirlpool of society, his guerilla warfare with journalism, Radicals, theologians, and all devotees of Dagon, it was not fated that Arnold could vie with the vast learning and Herculean industry of Sainte-Beuve. Neither as theologian, philosopher, nor publicist was Arnold at all adequately equipped by genius or by education for the office of supreme arbiter which he so airily, and perhaps so humorously, assumed to fill. And as poet, it is doubtful whether, with his Aurelian temperament and treacherous ear, he could ever have reached a much higher rank. But as critic of literature, his exquisite taste, his serene sense of equity, and that genial magnanimity which prompted him to give just value for every redeeming quality of those whom he loved the least—this made him a consummate critic of style. Though he has not left us an exhaustive review of our literature, as Sainte-Beuve has done for France, he has given us a group of short, lucid, suggestive canons of judgment, which serve as landmarks to an entire generation of critics.

The function of criticism—though not so high and mighty as Arnold proclaimed it with superb assurance—is not so futile an art as the sixty-two minor poets and the eleven thousand minor novelists are now wont to think it.

Arnold committed one of the few extravagances of his whole life when he told us that poetry was the criticism of life, that the function of criticism was to see all things as they really are in themselves—the very thing Kant told us we could never do. On the other hand, too much of what is now called criticism is the improvised chatter of a raw lad, portentously ignorant of the matter in hand. It is not the 'indolent reviewer' that we now suffer under, but the 'lightning reviewer,' the young man in a hurry with a Kodak, who finally disposes of a new work on the day of its publication. One of them naïvely complained the other morning of having to cut the pages, as if we ever suspected that he cut the pages of more than the preface and table of contents.

Criticism, according to Arnold's practice, if not according to his theory, had as its duty to lay down decisive canons of cultured judgment, to sift the sound from the vicious, and to maintain the purity of language and of style. To do all this in any masterly degree requires most copious knowledge, an almost encyclopædic training in literature, a natural genius for form and tone, and above all a temper of judicial balance. Johnson in the last century, Hallam, and possibly Southey, in this century, had some such gift; Macaulay and Carlyle had not, for they wanted genius for form and judicial balance. Now Arnold had this gift in supreme degree, in a degree superior to Johnson or to Hallam. He made far fewer mistakes than they did. He made very few mistakes. The touchstone of the great critic is to make very few mistakes, and never to be carried off his balance by any pet aversion or pet affection of his own, not to be biassed so much as a hair's-breadth by any salient merit or any irritating

defect, and always to keep an eye well open to the true proportion of any single book in the great world of men and of affairs and in the mighty realm of general literature.

For this reason we have so very few great critics, for the combination of vast knowledge, keen taste, and serene judgment is rare. It is thus so hard for any young person, for women, to become great in criticism: the young lack the wide experience; women lack the cool judicial temper. It is common enough to find those who are very sensitive to some rare charm, very acute to detect a subtle quality, or justly severe on some seductive failing. The rare power is to be able to apply to a complicated set of qualities the nicely adjusted compensations, to place a work, an author, in the right rank, and to do this for all orders of merit, with a sure, constant, unfailing touch—and without any real or conspicuous mistake.

This is what Arnold did, at any rate for our later poetry. He taught us to do it for ourselves, by using the instruments he brought to bear. He did much to kill a great deal of flashy writing and much vulgarity of mind that once had a curious vogue. I am accused of being *laudator temporis acti*, and an American newspaper was pleased to speak of me as 'this hopeless old man'; but I am never weary of saying, that at no epoch of our literature has the bulk of minor poetry been so graceful, so refined, so pure; the English language in daily use has never been written in so sound a form by so many writers; and the current taste in prose and verse has never been so just. And this is not a little owing to the criticism of Arnold, and to the ascendency which his judgment exerted over his time.

To estimate that lucidity and magnanimity of judgment he possessed, we should note how entirely open-minded he was to the defects of those whom he most loved, and to the merits of those whom he chiefly condemned. His ideal in poetry is essentially Wordsworthian, yet how sternly and how honestly he marks the *longueurs* of Wordsworth, his flatness, his mass of inferior work. Arnold's ideal of poetry was essentially alien to Byron, whose vulgar, slipshod, rhetorical manner he detested, whilst he recognised Byron's Titanic power—'our *soul* had felt him like the thunder's roll.' Arnold saw all the blunders made by Dryden, by Johnson, by Macaulay, by Coleridge, by Carlyle—but how heartily he can seize their real merits! Though drawn by all his thoughts and tastes towards such writers as Senancour, Amiel, Joubert, Heine, the Guérins, he does not affect to forget the limitations of their influence and the idiosyncrasy of their genius. In these days, when we are constantly assured that the function of criticism is to seize on some subtle and yet undetected quality that happens to have charmed you, and to wonder, in Delphic oracles, if Milton or Shelley ever quite touched that mystic circle, how refreshing it is to find Arnold always cool, always judicial—telling us even that Shakespeare has let drop some random stuff, and calmly reminding us that he had not 'the sureness of a perfect style,' as Milton had. Let us take together Arnold's summing up of all the qualities of Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, Shelley, and we shall see with what a just but loving hand he distributes the alternate meed of praise and blame. *Amant alterna Camœnæ.* But of all the Muses, she of criticism loves most the alternate modulation of *soprano* and *basso.*

Not that Arnold was invariably right, or that all his judgments are unassailable. His canons were always right; but it is not in mortals to apply them unerringly to men and to things. He seems somewhat inclined to undervalue Tennyson, of whom he speaks so little. He has not said enough for Shelley, perhaps not enough for Spenser, nor can we find that he loved with the true ardour the glorious romances of Walter Scott. But this is no place, nor can I pretend to be the man, to criticise our critic. For my own part, I accept his decisions in the main for all English poetry and on general questions of style. Accept them, that is, so far as it is in human nature to accept such high matters — 'errors excepted,' *exceptis excipiendis*. The important point on which his judgment is the most likely to be doubted or reversed by the supreme court of the twentieth century, lies in the relative places he has assigned to Wordsworth and to Shelley. He was by nature akin to Wordsworth, alien to Shelley; and the 'personal equation' may have told in this case. For my own part, I feel grateful to Arnold for asserting so well the dæmonic power of Byron, and so justly distinguishing the poet in his hour of inspiration from the peer in his career of affectation and vice. Arnold's piece on the 'Study of Poetry,' written as an introduction to the collected *English Poets*, should be preserved in our literature as the *norma* or *canon* of right opinion about poetry, as we preserve the standard coins in the Pyx, or the standard yard-measure in the old Jewel-house at Westminster.[1]

[1] This does not include mere *obiter dicta* in his familiar *Letters*. A great critic, like the pope, is infallible only when he is speaking *ex cathedra*, on matters of faith.

THE PHILOSOPHER AND THEOLOGIAN

Matthew Arnold, the philosopher, the politician, the theologian, does not need prolonged notice, inasmuch as he was anxious to disclaim any title to be ranked as any one of the three. But he entered into many a keen debate on philosophy, politics, and religion; and, whilst disavowing for himself any kind of system of belief, he sate in judgment on the beliefs of others, and assured us that the mission of Culture was to be supreme Court of Appeal for all brutalities of the vulgar and all immaturities of the ignorant. Indeed, since the very definition of Culture was 'to know the best that had ever been done and said,' to be 'a study of perfection,' 'to see things as they really are,' this Delphic priest of Culture was compelled to give us oracles about all the dark problems that harass the souls of philosophers, of politicians, and of theologians. He admitted this sacred duty, and manfully he strove to interpret the inspirations of the God within him. They were often charged with insight and wisdom; they were sometimes entirely mysterious; they frequently became a matter of language rather than of fact. But these responses of the deity have found no successor. Nor does any living mentor now attempt to guide our halting steps into the true path of all that should be done or may be known, with the same sure sense of serene omniscience.

Of Culture—which has so long been a synonym for our dear lost friend—it can hardly be expected that I should speak. I said what I had to say nearly thirty years ago, and I rejoice now to learn from his letters that my little piece gave him such innocent pleasure. He continued to rejoin for years; but, having fully

considered all his words, I have nothing to qualify or unsay. We are most of us trying to get what of Culture we can master, to see things as they are, to know the best, to attain to some little measure of Sweetness and Light—and we can only regret that our great master in all these things has carried his secret to the grave. The mystery still remains, *what* is best, *how* are things to be seen really as they are, by *what* means can we attain to perfection? Alas! the oracles are dumb. Apollo from his shrine can no more divine.

What we find so perplexing is, that the master, who, in judging poetry and literature, had most definite principles, clear-cut canons of judgment, and very strict tests of good and bad, doctrines which he was always ready to expound, and always able to teach others, no sooner passes into philosophy, into politics, into theology, than he disclaims any system, principles, or doctrines of any kind. 'Oh!' we hear him cry, 'I am no philosopher, no politician, no theologian. I am merely telling you, in my careless artless way, what you should think and do in these high matters. Culture whispers it to me, and I tell you; and only the Philistines, Anarchs, and Obscurantists object.' Now, it is obvious that no man can honestly dispose of all that lies *inter apices* of philosophy, politics, and religion, unless he have some scheme of dominant ideas. If he cannot range himself under any of the known schemes, if he be neither intuitionist, experimentalist, or eclectic, if he incline neither to authority nor to freedom, neither to revelation, nor to scepticism, nor to any of the ways of thinking that lie between any of these extremes—then he must have a brand-new, self-originated, dominant scheme of his own. If he tend towards no known system of ideas, then he

tends to his own system; and this is usually the narrowest and most capricious system that can be invented.

Not that Matthew Arnold's judgments in these things were narrow, however personal. It would be easy to show, if this were the place, what were the schools and orders of thought under which he ranged himself. The idea that he was an Ariel, a 'blessed Glendoveer,' or Mahatma of Light, was a charming bit of playfulness that relieved the tedium of debate. Whether as much as he fancied was gained to the cause of Sweetness by presenting the other side in fantastic costumes and airy caricature, by the iteration of nicknames, and the fustigation of dummy opponents, is now rather open to doubt. The public, and he himself, began to feel that he was carrying a joke too far when he brought the Trinity into the pantomime. Some of his playmates, it is said, rather enjoyed seeing themselves on the stage, and positively played up to harlequin and his wand. And it was good fun to all of us to see our friends and acquaintances in motley, capering about to so droll a measure.

With his refined and varied learning, his natural acuteness, and his rare gift of poetic insight, Matthew Arnold made some admirable suggestions in general philosophy. How true, how fruitful are his sayings about Hebraism and Hellenism, about Greece and Israel, about the true strength of Catholicism, about pagan and mediæval religious sentiment, about Spinoza, about Butler, Marcus Aurelius, and Goethe! All of these, and all he says about education, gain much by the pellucid grace and precision with which they are presented. They are presented, it is true, rather as the treasure-trove of instinctive taste than

as the laborious conclusions of any profound logic; for Culture, as we have often said, naturally approached even the problems of the universe, not so much from the side of metaphysics as from the side of *Belles-Lettres.* I can remember Matthew Arnold telling us with triumph that he had sought to exclude from a certain library a work of Herbert Spencer, by reading to the committee a passage therefrom which he pronounced to be clumsy in style. He knew as little about Spencer's *Synthetic Philosophy* as he did about Comte's, which he pretended to discuss with an air of laughable superiority, at which no doubt he was himself the first to laugh.

Arnold, indeed, like M. Jourdain, was constantly talking Comte without knowing it, and was quite delighted to find how cleverly he could do it. There is a charming and really grand passage in which he sums up his *conclusion* at the close of his *Culture and Anarchy.* I cannot resist the pleasure of quoting this fine piece of English, every word of which I devoutly believe—

> 'But for us,—who believe in right reason, in the duty and possibility of extricating and elevating our best self, in the progress of humanity towards perfection,—for us the framework of society, that theatre on which this august drama has to unroll itself, is sacred; and whoever administers it, and however we may seek to remove them from their tenure of administration, yet while they administer, we steadily and with undivided heart support them in repressing anarchy and disorder; because without order there can be no society, and without society there can be no human perfection.'

It so happens that this, the summing up of the mission of Culture, is entirely and exactly the mission

of Positivism, and is even expressed in the very language used by Comte in all his writings, and notably in his *Appeal to Conservatives* (1855). How pleasantly we can fancy Culture now meeting the Founder of Positivism in some Elysian Fields, and accosting him in that inimitably genial way: 'Ah, well! I see now that we are not so far apart, but I never had patience to read your rather dry French, you know!'

Of his Theology, or his anti-Theology, even less need be said here. It was most interesting and pregnant, and was certainly the source of his great popularity and vogue. Here indeed he touched to the quick the Hebraism of our middle classes, the thought of our cultured classes, the insurgent instincts of the People. It was a singular mixture—Anglican divinity adjusted to the Pantheism of Spinoza; to parody a famous definition of Huxley's, it was Anglicanism *minus* Christianity, and even Theism. It is difficult for the poor Philistine to grasp the notion that all this devotional sympathy with the Psalmists, Prophets, and Evangelists, this beautiful enthusiasm for 'the secret of Jesus' and the 'profound originality' of Paul, were possible to a man whose intellect rejected the belief that there was even any probable evidence for the personality of God, or for the celestial immortality of the soul, who flatly denied the existence of miracle, and treated the entire fabric of dogmatic theology as a figment. Yet this is the truth; and what is more, this startling, and somewhat paradoxical, transformation-scene of the Anglican creeds and formularies sank deep into the reflective minds of many thinking men and women, who could neither abandon the spiritual poetry of the Bible nor resist the demonstrations of science. The combination, amongst many combina-

tions, is one that, in a different form, was taught by Comte, which has earned for Positivism the title of Catholicism *plus* Science. Matthew Arnold, who but for his father's too early death might have been the son of a bishop, and who, in the last century, would himself have been a classical dean, made an analogous and somewhat restricted combination that is properly described as Anglicanism *plus* Pantheism.

Let us think no more of his philosophy—the philosophy of an ardent reader of Plato, Spinoza, and Goethe: of his politics—the politics of an Oxford don who lived much at the Athenæum Club: nor of his theology—the theology of an English clergyman who had resigned his orders on conscientious grounds. We will think only of the subtle poet, the consummate critic, the generous spirit, the radiant intelligence, whose over-ambitious fancies are even now fading into oblivion —whose rare imaginings in stately verse have yet to find a wider and a more discerning audience.

CHAPTER VI

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS

MORE than six years have come and gone since, amongst April blossoms, an English master in the literature of Italy was laid in his premature grave, within that most pathetic and most sacred spot of Rome where lie so many famous Englishmen. 'They gave us,' wrote his daughter in a beautiful record of the last scene, 'they gave us a little piece of ground close to the spot where Shelley lies buried. In all the world there surely is no place more penetrated with the powers of poetry and natural beauty.' All travellers know how true is this: few spots on earth possess so weird a power over the imagination. It is described by Horatio Brown in the volume from which I have been quoting,[1] 'the grave is within a pace of Trelawny's and a hand-touch of Shelley's *Cor Cordium*, in the embrasure of the ancient city walls.' Fit resting-place for one who of all the men of our generation best knew, loved, and understood the Italian genius in literature!

There are not wanting signs that the reputation of J. Addington Symonds had been growing in his latest years, it has been growing since his too early death. His later work is stronger, richer, and more permanent than his earlier work—excellent as is almost all his prose.

[1] *John Addington Symonds: a Biography.* By Horatio F. Brown. With portraits and other illustrations, in two vols. 8vo. London, 1895.

Even the learning and brilliancy of the *Renaissance in Italy* do not impress me with the same sense of his powers as his *Benvenuto Cellini*, his *Michelangelo*, his last two volumes of *Essays, Speculative and Suggestive* (1890), and some passages in the posthumous *Autobiography* embodied in the *Life* by H. F. Brown. For grasp of thought, directness, sureness of judgment, the *Essays* of 1890 seem to me the most solid things that Symonds has left. He grew immensely after middle age in force, simplicity, depth of interest and of insight. He pruned his early exuberance; he boldly grasped the great problems of life and thought; he spoke forth his mind with a noble courage and signal frankness. He was lost to us too early: he died at fifty-two, after a life of incessant suffering, constantly on the brink of death; a life maintained, in spite of all trials, with rare tenacity of purpose. And as we look back now, we may wonder that his barely twenty years of labour under such cruel obstacles produced so much. For I reckon some forty works of his, great and small, including at least some ten important books of prose in some twenty solid volumes. That is a great achievement for one who was a permanent invalid and was cut off before old age.

The publication of his *Life* by his friend H. F. Brown, embodying his own *Autobiography* and his *Letters*, has now revealed to the public what even his friends only partly understood, how stern a battle for life was waged by Symonds from his childhood. His inherited delicacy of constitution drove him to pass the larger part of his life abroad, and at last compelled him to make his home in an Alpine retreat. The pathetic motto and preface he prefixed to his *Essays* (1890) shows how deeply he felt his compulsory exile—*εὑρετικὸν εἶναί*

φασι τὴν ἐρημίαν, 'solitude,' they say, 'favours the search after truth.'—'The *Essays*,' he declares, 'written in the isolation of this Alpine retreat (Davos-Platz, 1890), express the opinions and surmisings of one who long has watched in solitude, "as from a ruined tower," the world of thought, and circumstance, and action.' And he goes on to speak of his 'prolonged seclusion from populous cities and the society of intellectual equals'—a seclusion which lasted, with some interruptions, for more than fifteen years. And during a large part of his life of active literary production, a period of scarcely more than twenty years, he was continually incapacitated by pain and physical prostration, as we now may learn from his *Autobiography* and *Letters*. They give us a fine picture of intellectual energy overcoming bodily distress. How few of the readers who delighted in his sketches of the columbines and asphodels on the Monte Generoso, and the vision of the Propylæa in moonlight, understood the physical strain on him whose spirit bounded at these sights and who painted them for us with so radiant a brush.

Symonds, I have said, grew and deepened immensely in his later years, and it was only perhaps in the very last decade of his life that he reached the full maturity of his powers. His beautiful style, which was in early years somewhat too luscious, too continuously florid, too redolent of the elaborated and glorified prize-essay, grew stronger, simpler, more direct in his later pieces, though to the last it had still some savour of the fastidious literary recluse. In the *Catholic Reaction* (1886), in the *Essays* (1890), in the posthumous *Autobiography* (begun in 1889), he grapples with the central problems of modern society and philosophic thought, and has left the somewhat dilettante tourist of the

Cornice and Ravenna far, far behind him. As a matter of style, I hold the *Benvenuto Cellini* (of 1888) to be a masterpiece of skilful use of language: so that the inimitable *Memoirs* of the immortal vagabond read to us now like an original of Smollett. It is far the most popular of Symonds' books, in large part no doubt from the nature of the work, but it is in form the most racy of all his pieces; and the last thing that any one could find in it would be any suggestion of academic euphuism. Had Symonds from the first written with that *verve* and mother-wit, his readers doubtless would have been trebled.

It has been an obstacle to the recognition of Symonds's great merits that until well past middle life he was known to the public only by descriptive and critical essays in detached pieces, and these addressed mainly to a scholarly and travelled few, whilst the nervous and learned works of his more glowing autumn came towards the end of his life on a public rather satiated by exquisite analysis of landscape and poems. Even now, it may be said, the larger public are not yet familiar with his exhaustive work on Michelangelo, his latest *Essays*, and his *Autobiography* and *Letters*. In these we see that to a vast knowledge of Italian literature and art, Symonds united a judgment of sound balance, a courageous spirit, and a mind of rare sincerity and acumen.

His work, with all its volume in the whole, is strictly confined within its chosen fields. It concerns Greek poetry, the scenery of Italy and Greece, Italian literature and art, translations of Greek and Italian poetry, volumes of lyrics, critical studies of some English poets, essays in philosophy and the principles of art and style. This in itself is a considerable field, but it includes no

other part of ancient or modern literature, no history but that of the Renaissance, no trace of interest in social, political, or scientific problems. In the pathetic preface of 1890, Symonds himself seems fully to recognise how much he was used to survey the world of things from a solitary peak. His work then is essentially, in a peculiar degree for our times, the work of a student looking at things through books, from the point of view of literature, and for a literary end—*οὐ πρᾶξις ἀλλὰ γνῶσις* is his motto. And this gospel is always and of necessity addressed to the few rather than to the mass.

CRITICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE ESSAYS

Until Symonds was well past the age of thirty-five —*nel mezzo del cammin*—he was known only by his very graceful pictures of Italy and his most scholarly analysis of Greek poetry. I have long been wont to regard his two series of the *Greek Poets* (1873, 1876) as the classical and authoritative estimate of this magnificent literature. These studies seem to me entirely right, convincing, and illuminating. There is little more to be said on the subject; and there is hardly a point missed or a judgment to be reversed. He can hardly even be said to have over-rated or under-rated any important name. And this is the more remarkable in that Symonds ranges over Greek poetry throughout all the thirteen centuries which separate the *Iliad* from *Hero and Leander*; and he is just as lucidly judicial whether he deals with Hesiod, Empedocles, Æschylus, or Menander.

Symonds was certainly far more widely and profoundly versed in Greek poetry than any Englishman

who in our day has analysed it for the general reader. And it is plain that no scholar of his eminence has been master of a style so fascinating and eloquent. He has the art of making the Greek poets live to our eyes as if we saw in pictures the scenes they sing. A fine example of this power is in the admirable essay on Pindar in the first series, when he describes the festival of Olympia as Pindar saw it. And we who have been trying to get up a thrill over the gate-money 'sports' in the Stadium of Athens, may turn to Symonds's description of the Olympic games of old—'a festival in the fullest sense of the word popular, but at the same time consecrated by religion, dignified by patriotic pride, adorned with art.' And he gives us a vivid sketch of the scene in the blaze of summer, with the trains of pilgrims and deputies, ambassadors and athletes, sages, historians, poets, painters, sculptors, wits, and statesmen—all thronging into the temple of Zeus to bow before the chryselephantine masterpiece of Pheidias.

These very fine critical estimates of the Greek poets would no doubt have had a far wider audience had they been from the first more organically arranged, less full of Greek citations and remarks intelligible only to scholars. As it is, they are studies in no order, chronological or analytic; for Theocritus and the Anthologies come in the first series, and Homer and Æschylus in the second. The style, too, if always eloquent and picturesque, is rather too continuously picturesque and eloquent. *Con espressione dolcissima* is a delightful variety in a sonata, but we also crave a *scherzo*, and *adagio* and *prestissimo* passages. Now Symonds, who continually delights us with fine images and fascinating colour, is too fond of satiating us

with images and with colour, till we long for a space of quiet reflection and neutral good sense. And not only are the images too constant, too crowded, and too luscious—though, it must be said, they are never incongruous or commonplace—but some of the very noblest images are apt to falter under their own weight of ornament.

Here is an instance from his *Pindar*—a grand image, perhaps a little too laboriously coloured—

'He who has watched a sunset attended by the passing of a thunderstorm in the outskirts of the Alps, who has seen the distant ranges of the mountains alternately obscured by cloud and blazing with the concentrated brightness of the sinking sun, while drifting scuds of hail and rain, tawny with sunlight, glistening with broken rainbows, clothe peak and precipice and forest in the golden veil of flame-irradiated vapour—who has heard the thunder bellow in the thwarting folds of hills, and watched the lightning, like a snake's tongue, flicker at intervals amid gloom and glory—knows in nature's language what Pindar teaches with the voice of art.'

And, not content with this magnificent and very just simile, Symonds goes on to tell us how Pindar 'combines the strong flight of the eagle, the irresistible force of the torrent, the richness of Greek wine, the majestic pageantry of nature in one of her sublimer moods.' This is too much: we feel that, if the metaphors are not getting mixed, they form a draught too rich for us to quaff.

Symonds has, however, an excellent justification to offer for this pompous outburst, that he was anxious to give us a vivid sense of Pindar's own 'tumidity—an overblown exaggeration of phrase,' for 'Pindar uses images like precious stones, setting them together in

a mass, without caring to sort them, so long as they produce a gorgeous show.' We all know how dangerous a model the great lyrist may become—

> ' Pindarum quisquis studet æmulari,
> Iule, ceratis ope Dædalea
> Nititur pinnis, vitreo daturus
> Nomina ponto.'

Symonds sought to show us something of Pindar's 'fiery flight, the torrent-fulness, the intoxicating charm' of his odes; and so he himself in his enthusiasm 'fervet, immensusque ruit profundo ore.'

Whenever Symonds is deeply stirred with the nobler types of Greek poetry, this dithyrambic mood comes on him, and he gives full voice to the God within. Here is a splendid symphony called forth by the Trilogy of Æschylus—

'There is, in the *Agamemnon*, an oppressive sense of multitudinous crimes, of sins gathering and swelling to produce a tempest. The air we breathe is loaded with them. No escape is possible. The marshalled thunderclouds roll ever onward, nearer and more near, and far more swiftly than the foot can flee. At last the accumulated storm bursts in the murder of Agamemnon, the majestic and unconscious victim, felled like a steer at the stall; in the murder of Cassandra, who foresees her fate, and goes to meet it with the shrinking of some dumb creature, and with the helplessness of one who knows that doom may not be shunned; in the lightning-flash of Clytemnestra's arrogance, who hitherto has been a glittering hypocrite, but now proclaims herself a fiend incarnate. As the Chorus cries, the rain of blood, that hitherto has fallen drop by drop, descends in torrents on the house of Atreus: but the end is not yet. The whole tragedy becomes yet more sinister when we regard it as the prelude to ensuing tragedies, as the overture to fresh symphonies and similar

catastrophes. Wave after wave of passion gathers and breaks in these stupendous scenes; the ninth wave mightier than all, with a crest whereof the spray is blood, falls foaming; over the outspread surf of gore and ruin the curtain drops, to rise upon the self-same theatre of new woes.'

This unquestionably powerful picture of the *Agamemnon* opens with a grand trumpet-burst that Ruskin might envy: 'an oppressive sense of multitudinous crimes'—'the air we breathe is loaded with them'—'Agamemnon, the majestic and unconscious victim, felled like a steer at the stall'—Cassandra with the shrinking of some dumb creature—Clytemnestra, the glittering hypocrite, the fiend incarnate. Down to this point the passage is a piece of noble English, and a true analysis of the greatest of pure tragedies. But when we come to the rain of blood, the waves with their spray of blood, the 'outspread surf of gore,' we begin to feel exhausted and satiated with horror, and the whole terrific paragraph ends in something perilously near to bathos. I have cited this passage as a characteristic example of Symonds in his splendid powers and his besetting weakness—his mastery of the very heart of Greek poetry and his proneness to redundancy of ornament; his anxiety to paint the lily and to gild the refined gold of his own pure and very graceful English.

I have always enjoyed the *Sketches in Italy and Greece* (1874) and the *Sketches and Studies in Italy* (1879) as delightful reminiscences of some of the loveliest scenes on earth. They record the thoughts of one who was at once scholar, historian, poet, and painter—painter, it is true, in words, but one who saw Italy and Athens as a painter does, or rather as he should

do. The combination is very rare, and, to those who can follow the guidance, very fascinating. The fusion of history and landscape is admirable: the Siena, the Perugia, the Palermo, Syracuse, Rimini, and Ravenna, with their stories of St. Catherine, the Baglioni, the Normans of Hauteville, Nicias and Demosthenes, the Malatesti, and the memories of the Pineta, are pictures that dwell in the thoughts of all who love these immortal spots, and should inspire all who do not know them with the thirst to do so. The Athens is quite an education in itself, and it makes one regret that it is the one sketch that Symonds has given us in Greece proper. To the cultured reader, he is the ideal cicerone for Italy.

The very completeness and variety of the knowledge that Symonds has lavished on these pictures of Italian cities may somewhat limit their popularity, for he appeals at once to such a combination of culture that many readers lose something of his ideas. Passages from Greek, Latin, and Italian abound in them; the history is never sacrificed to the landscape, nor the landscape to the poetry, nor the scholarship to the sunlight, the air, and the scents of flower or the sound of the waves and the torrents. All is there; and in this way they surpass those pictures of Italian scenes that we may read in Ruskin, George Eliot, or Professor Freeman. Freeman has not the poetry and colour of Symonds; George Eliot has not his ease and grace, his fluidity of improvisation; and Ruskin, with all his genius for form and colour, has no such immense and catholic grasp of history as a whole.

But it cannot be denied that these *Sketches*, like the *Greek Poets*, are too continuously florid, too profusely coloured, without simplicity and repose. The subjects

admit of colour, nay, they demand it; they justify enthusiasm, and suggest a luxurious wealth of sensation. But their power and their popularity would have been greater, if their style had more light and shade, if the prosaic foreground and background had been set down in jog-trot prose. The high-blooded barb that Symonds mounts never walks: he curvets, ambles, caracoles, and prances with unfailing elegance, but with somewhat too monotonous a consciousness of his own grace. And there is a rather more serious weakness. These beautiful sketches are *pictures*, descriptions of what can be *seen*, not records of what has been *felt*. Now, it is but a very limited field indeed within which words can describe scenery. The emotions that scenery suggests can be given us in verse or in prose. Byron perhaps could not paint word-pictures like Symonds, but his *emotions* in a thunderstorm in the Alps, or as he gazes on the Silberhorn, his grand outburst in Rome—

> 'Oh Rome! my country! city of the soul!
> The orphans of the heart must turn to thee,
> Lone mother of dead empires!'

strike the imagination more than a thousand word-pictures. Ruskin's elaborate descriptions of Venice and Florence would not have touched us as they do, had he not made us feel all that Venice and Florence meant to him. This is the secret of Byron, of Goethe, even of *Corinne* and *Transformation*. But this secret Symonds never learned. He paints, he describes, he tells us all he *knows* and what he has *read*. He does not tell us what he has *felt*, so as to make us feel it to our bones. Yet such is the only possible form of reproducing the effect of a scene.

ITALIAN LITERATURE AND ART

It will, I think, be recognised by all, that no English writer of our time has equalled Symonds in knowledge of the entire range of Italian literature, from Guido Cavalcanti to Leopardi, and none certainly has treated it with so copious and brilliant a pen. The seven octavo volumes on the *Italian Renaissance* occupied him for eleven years (1875-1886); and besides these there are the two volumes on *Michelangelo* (1892), two volumes of *Benvenuto Cellini* (1888), a volume on Boccaccio (1895), and the *Sonnets* of Michelangelo and Campanella (1878). And we must not forget the early essay on Dante (1872), and translations from Petrarch, Ariosto, Pulci, and many more. This constitutes an immense and permanent contribution to our knowledge, for it not only gives us a survey of Italian literature for its three grand centuries, but it presents such an ample analysis of the works reviewed that every reader can judge for himself how just and subtle are the judgments pronounced by the critic. The studies of Petrarch, Boccaccio, of the Humanists and Poliziano, of Michelangelo, Lionardo, Cellini, Ariosto, and Tasso, are particularly full and instructive. The whole series of estimates is exhaustive. To see how complete it is, one need only compare it with the brief summaries and dry catalogues of such a book as Hallam's *Literature of Europe.* Hallam gives us notes on Italian literature: Symonds gives us biographies and synopses.

This exhaustive treatment brings its own Nemesis. The magic fountain of Symonds's learning and eloquence pours on till it threatens to become a flood. We have

almost more than we need or can receive. We welcome all that he has to tell us about the origins of Italian poetry, about Boccaccio and contemporary *Novelle*, about the *Orlando* cycle and the pathetic story of Tasso. And so, all that we learn of Machiavelli, Bruno, Campanella, Sarpi is exactly what we want, told us in exactly the way we enjoy. But our learned guide pours on with almost equal eloquence and detail into all the ramifications of the literature in its pedantry, its decadence, its affectation. And at last the most devoted reader begins to have enough of the copyists of Dante and Boccaccio, of the *Hypnerotomachia* and its brood, of *Laude* and *Ballate*, of *Rispetti* and *Capitoli*, and all the languishments and hermaphroditisms of Guarini, Berni, and Marino. Nearly four thousand pages charged with extracts and references make a great deal to master: and the general reader may complain that they stoop to register so many conceits and so much filth.

In all that he has written on Italian art, Symonds has shown ripe knowledge and consummate judgment. The second volume of his *Italian Renaissance* is wholly given to art, but he treats art incidentally in many other volumes, in the works on Michelangelo and Cellini, and in very many essays. His *Michelangelo Buonarroti* (1892) is a masterly production, going as it does to the root of the central problems of great art. And his estimate of Cellini is singularly discriminating and sound. His accounts of the origin of Renaissance architecture, of Lionardo, of Luini, of Correggio, and Giorgione are all essentially just and decisive. Indeed, in his elaborate survey of Italian art for three centuries, from Nicolas of Pisa to Vasari, though few would venture to maintain that Symonds is always right, he

would be a bold man who should try to prove that he was often wrong.

But this is very far from meaning that Symonds has said everything, or has said the last word. The most cursory reader must notice how great is the contrast between the view of Italian art taken by Symonds and that taken by Ruskin. Not that they differ so deeply in judging specific works of art or even particular artists. It is a profound divergence of beliefs on religion, philosophy, and history. That Revival of Paganism, which is abomination to Ruskin, is the subject of Symonds' commemoration, and even of his modified admiration. The whole subject is far too complex and too radical to be discussed here. For my own part, I am not willing to forsake the lessons of either. Both have an intimate knowledge of Italian art and its history—Ruskin as a poet and painter of genius, Symonds as a scholar and historian of great learning and industry. Ruskin has passionate enthusiasm; Symonds has laborious impartiality, a cool judgment, and a catholic taste. Ruskin is an almost mediæval Christian; Symonds is a believer in science and in evolution.

The contrast between the two, which is admirably illustrated by their different modes of regarding Raffaelle at Rome and Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, is a fresh form of the old maxim—Both are right in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny. Ruskin's enthusiasm is lavished on the Catholic and chivalric nobleness of the thirteenth century; Symonds's enthusiasm is lavished on the humanity and the naturalism of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. We accept the gifts of both ages, and we will not dispense with either. Ruskin denounced Neo-classicism and the Humanism

of the Renaissance; Symonds denounced the superstition and inhumanity of Mediævalism. But Ruskin has shown us how unjust was Symonds to Catholicism, precisely as Symonds has shown us how unjust was Ruskin to the Renaissance.

Let us thankfully accept the lessons of both these learned masters of literature and art. To Ruskin, the Renaissance is a mere episode, and a kind of local plague. With Symonds it is the centre of a splendid return to Truth and Beauty. Ruskin's point of view is far the wider; Symonds's point of view is far the more systematic. Ruskin is thinking of the religion and the poetry of all the ages; Symonds is profoundly versed in the literature and art of a particular epoch in a single country. Ruskin knows nothing, and wishes to know nothing, of the masses of literature and history which Symonds has absorbed. Symonds, on the other hand, despises a creed which teaches such superstitions, and a Church which ends in such corruptions. Spiritually, perhaps, Ruskin's enthusiasms are the more important and the purer; philosophically and historically, Symonds' enthusiasms are the more scientific and the more rational. Both, in their way, are real. Let us correct the one by the other. The Renaissance was an indispensable progress in the evolution of Europe, and yet withal a moral depravation—full of immortal beauty, full also of infernal vileness, like the Sin of Milton, as she guarded Hell-gate.

The Renaissance in Italy (alas! why did he use this Frenchified word in writing in English of an Italian movement, when some of us have been struggling for years past to assert the pure English form of *Renascence*?)—*The Renaissance in Italy* is a very valuable and brilliant contribution to our literature, but it is not

a complete book even yet, not an organic book, not a work of art. The volumes on art and on literature are in every way the best; but even in these the want of proportion is very manifest. Cellini, in Symonds, occupies nearly five times the space given to Raffaelle. Barely fifteen pages (admirable in themselves) are devoted to Lionardo, whilst a whole chapter is devoted to the late school of Bologna. It is the same with the literature. Pietro Aretino is treated with the same scrupulous interest as Boccaccio or Ariosto. The *Hermaphroditus* and the *Adone* are commemorated with as much care as the poems of Dante or Petrarch. A history of literature, no doubt, must take note of all popular books, however pedantic or obscene. But we are constantly reminded how very much Symonds is absorbed in purely literary interests rather than in social and truly historic interests.

The Renaissance in Italy, if regarded as a survey of the part given by one nation to the whole movement of the Renascence in Europe over some two centuries and a half, has one very serious *lacuna* and defect. In all these seven volumes there is hardly one word about the *science* of the Renascence. Now, the revival for the modern world of physical science from the state to which science had been carried by Hippocrates, Aristotle, Archimedes, and Hipparchus in the ancient world, was one of the greatest services of the Renascence—one of the greatest services ever conferred on mankind. And in this work Italy held a foremost part, if she did not absolutely lead the way. In Mathematics, Mechanics, Astronomy, Physics, Botany, Zoology, Medicine, and Surgery the Italians did much to prepare the ground for modern science. Geometry, Algebra, Mechanics, Anatomy, Geography, Jurispru-

dence, and General Philosophy owe very much to the Italian genius; but of these we find nothing in these seven crowded volumes. Symonds has nothing to tell us of the wonderful tale of the rise of modern Algebra —of Tartaglia and Cardan; nothing of the origins of modern Geometry and Mechanics; nothing of the school of Vesalius at Pavia, of Fallopius and Eustachius and the early Italian anatomists; nothing of Cæsalpinus and the early botanists; nothing of Lilio and the reformed Calendar of Pope Gregory; nothing of Alciati and the revival of Roman law. A whole chapter might have been bestowed on Lionardo as a man of science, and another on Galileo, whose physical discoveries began in the sixteenth century. And a few pages might have been saved for Christopher Columbus. And it is the more melancholy that the great work out of which these names are omitted has room for elaborate disquisitions on the *Rifacimento* of Orlando, and a perfect Newgate Calendar of Princes and Princesses, Borgias, Cencis, Orsinis, and Accorambonis. Symonds has given us some brilliant analyses of the literature and art of Italy during three centuries of the Renascence. But he has not given us its full meaning and value in science, in philosophy, or in history, for he has somewhat misunderstood both the Middle Ages which created the Renascence and the Revolution which it created in turn, nor has he fully grasped the relations of the Renascence to both.

POEMS AND TRANSLATIONS

It is impossible to omit some notice of Symonds's poetry, because he laboured at this art with such courage and perseverance, and has left so much to the

world, besides, I am told, whole packets of verses in manuscript. He published some five or six volumes of verse, including his Prize Poem of 1860, and he continued to the last to write poems and translations. But he was not a poet: he knew it—'I have not the inevitable touch of the true poet,' he says very justly in his *Autobiography*. Matthew Arnold told him that he obtained the Newdigate prize not for the style of his *Escorial*—which, in its obvious fluency, is a quite typical prize poem—'but because it showed an intellectual grasp of the subject.' That is exactly the truth about all Symonds's verses. They show a high intellectual grasp of the subject; but they have not the inevitable touch of the true poet.

These poems are very thoughtful, very graceful, very interesting, and often pathetic. They rank very high amongst the minor poetry of his time. They are full of taste, of ingenuity, of subtlety, nay, of beauty. There is hardly a single fault to be found in them, hardly a commonplace stanza, not one false note. And yet, as he said with his noble sincerity, he has scarcely written one great line—one line that we remember, and repeat, and linger over. He frankly recalls how 'Vaughan at Harrow told me the truth when he said that my besetting sin was "fatal facility."' And at Balliol, he says, Jowett 'chid me for ornaments and mannerisms of style.'

Symonds's poetry is free from mannerisms, but it has that 'fatal facility'—which no fine poetry can have. It is full of ornament—of really graceful ornament; but it sadly wants variety, fire, the incommunicable 'form' of true poetry. The very quantity of it has perhaps marred his reputation, good as most of it is regarded as minor poetry. But does the world want minor

poetry at all? The world does not, much less minor poetry mainly on the theme of death, waste, disappointment, and doubt. But to the cultured few who love scholarly verse packed close with the melancholy musings of a strong brain and a brave heart, to Symonds's own friends and contemporaries, these sonnets and lyrics will long continue to have charm and meaning. He said in the touching preface to *Many Moods*, 1878, dedicated to his friend, Roden Noel, who has now rejoined him in the great Kingdom, he trusted 'that some moods of thought and feeling, not elsewhere expressed by me in print, may live within the memory of men like you, as part of me!' It was a legitimate hope; and it is not, and it will not be, unfulfilled.

The translations in verse are excellent. From translations in verse we hardly expect original poetry; and it must be doubted if any translation in verse can be at once accurate, literal, and poetic. Symonds was a born translator: his facility, his ingenuity, his scholarly insight, his command of language prompted him to give us a profusion of translations in verse, even in his prose writings. They are most of them as good as literal transcripts of a poem can be made. But they are not quite poetry. In Sappho's hymn to Aphrodite, Symonds's opening lines—

> 'Star-throned, incorruptible Aphrodite,
> Child of Zeus, wile-weaving, I supplicate thee.'

are a most accurate rendering; but they do not give the melodious wail of—

> 'ποικιλόθρον', ἀθάνατ' Ἀφρόδιτα,
> παῖ Δίος, δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε.'

The Sonnets of Michelangelo and of Campanella, 1878,

is a most valuable contribution to Italian literature. These most powerful pieces had never been translated into English from the authentic text. They are abrupt, obscure, and subtle, and especially require the help of an expert. And in Symonds they found a consummate expert.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS SPECULATIONS

It was not until a few years before his death that Symonds was known as a writer on subjects other than history, literature, and art. But in his fiftieth year he issued in two volumes his *Essays, Speculative and Suggestive*, 1890. These, as I have said, are written in a style more nervous and simple than his earlier studies; they deal with larger topics with greater seriousness and power. The essays on *Evolution*, on its *Application to Literature and Art*, on *Principles of Criticism*, on the *Provinces and Relations of the Arts*, are truly *suggestive*, as he claims them to be; and are wise, ingenious, and fertile. The *Notes on Style*, on the history of style, national style, personal style, are sound and interesting, if not very novel. And the same is true of what he has written of Expression, of Caricature, and of our Elizabethan and Victorian poetry.

The great value of Symonds's judgments about literature and art arises from his uniform combination of comprehensive learning with judicial temper. He is very rarely indeed betrayed into any form of extravagance, either by passionate admiration or passionate disdain. And he hardly ever discusses any subject of which he has not a systematic and exhaustive knowledge. His judgment always has much better

control over his emotions than has that of Ruskin; he has a wider and more erudite familiarity with the whole field of modern literature and art than had either Ruskin or Matthew Arnold. Indeed, we may fairly assume that none of his contemporaries have been so profoundly saturated at once with classical poetry, Italian and Elizabethan literature, and modern poetry, English, French, and German. Though Symonds had certainly not the literary charm of Ruskin, or Matthew Arnold, perhaps of one or two others among his contemporaries, he had no admitted superior as a critic in learning or in judgment.

But that which I find most interesting—I venture to think most important—in these later essays, in the *Autobiography and the Letters*, is the frank and courageous handling of the eternal problems of Man and the Universe, Humanity and its Destiny, the relations between the individual and the environment. All these Symonds has treated with a clearness and force that some persons hardly expected from the loving critic of Sappho, Poliziano, and Cellini. For my own part, I know few things more penetrating and suggestive in this field than the essays on the *Philosophy of Evolution* and its applications, the *Nature Myths*, *Darwin's Thoughts about God*, the *Limits of Knowledge*, and *Notes on Theism*. Symonds avows himself an agnostic, rather tending towards pantheism, in the mood of Goethe and of Darwin. As his friend puts it truly enough in the *Biography*—'Essentially he desired the warmth of a personal God, intellectually he could conceive that God under human attributes only, and he found himself driven to say "No" to each human presentment of Him.'

In his *Essays* and in the *Autobiography* Symonds has

summed up his final beliefs, and it was right that on his grave-stone they should inscribe his favourite lines of Cleanthes, which he was never tired of citing, which he said must be the form of our prayers—

> 'Lead Thou me, God, Law, Reason, Motion, Life!
> All names alike for Thee are vain and hollow.'

But he separated himself from the professed theists who assert 'that God must be a *Person*, a *righteous Judge*, a *loving Ruler*, a *Father*' (the italics are his—Notes on Theism. *Essays*, ii. p. 291). This is nearly the same as Matthew Arnold's famous phrase—'the stream of tendency by which all things seek to fulfil the law of their being'—or 'the Eternal not ourselves that makes for righteousness.' And Matthew Arnold also could find no probable evidence for the belief that God is a *Person*. The reasoning of Symonds in these later essays is not wholly unlike that which leads Herbert Spencer to his idea of the Unknowable—'the Infinite and Eternal Energy by which all things are created and sustained.' But Symonds's own belief tended rather more to a definite and moral activity of the Energy he could not define, and he was wont to group himself under Darwin rather than Spencer.

He had reflected upon Comte's conception of humanity as the supreme power of which we can predicate certain knowledge and personal relations; and in many of his later utterances Symonds approximates in general purpose to that conception. His practical religion is always summed up in his favourite motto from Goethe—'im Ganzen, Guten, Schönen, resolut zu leben,' or in the essentially Positivist maxim—*τοὺς ζῶντας εὖ δρᾶν*, 'do thy duty throughout this life.' But it seems that the idea of humanity had been early

presented to him in its pontifical, not in its rational form. And a man who was forced to watch the busy world of men in solitude from afar was not likely to accept a practical religion of life for others—for family, country, and humanity. It is possible that his eloquent relative who built in the clouds of Oxford metaphysic so imposing a nephelococcygia may have influenced him more than he knew. In any case, he sums up his 'religious evolution' thus (*Biography*, ii. 132): 'Having rejected dogmatic Christianity in all its forms, Broad Church, Anglicanism, the Gospel of Comte, Hegel's superb identification of human thought with essential Being, etc. etc. . . . I came to fraternise with Goethe, Cleanthes, Whitman, Bruno, Darwin.'

They who for years have delighted in those brilliant studies that Symonds poured forth on literature, art, criticism, and history, should become familiar with the virile meditations he scattered through the *Autobiography* and *Letters* in the memoir compiled by Horatio Brown. They will see how steadily his power grew to the last both in thought and in form. His earlier form had undoubtedly tended to mannerism—not to euphuism or 'preciosity' indeed—but to an excess of colour and saccharine. As he said of another famous writer on the Renaissance, we feel sometimes in these *Sketches* as if we were lost in a plantation of sugar-cane. But Symonds never was seriously a victim of the Circe of preciosity, she who turns her lovers into swine—of that style which he said 'has a peculiarly disagreeable effect on my nerves—like the presence of a civet cat.' He was luscious, not precious. His early style was vitiated by a fatal proneness to Ruskinese. But at last he became virile and not luscious at all.

And that other defect of his work—its purely literary aspect—he learned at last to develop into a definite social and moral philosophy. He was quite aware of his besetting fault. 'The fault of my education as a preparation for literature was that it was exclusively literary' (*Autobiography*, i. 218). That no doubt is answerable for much of the shortcomings of his *Renaissance*, the exaggeration of mere scandalous pedantry, of frigid conceits, and the entire omission of science. It is significant to read from one of Oxford's most brilliant sons a scathing denunciation of the superficial and mechanical 'cram' which Oxford still persists in calling its 'education' (*Autobiography*, i. 218).

It is a moving and inspiring tale, is this story of the life of a typical and exemplary man of letters. Immense learning, perseverance, frankness and honesty of temper, with the egoism incidental to all autobiographies and intimate letters, and in this case perhaps emphasised by a life of exile and disease, a long and cruel battle with inherited weakness of constitution, a bright spirit, and intellect alert, unbroken to the last. His friends still echo the words that Jowett wrote for his tomb—

'Ave carissime !
Nemo te magis in corde amicos fovebat,
Nec in simplices et indoctos
Benevolentior erat.'

CHAPTER VII

ON ENGLISH PROSE

(An address to the Bodley Literary Society, Oxford.
President, C. René Harrison)

Fili mi dilectissime (if, sir, I may borrow the words of the late Lord Derby when, as Chancellor of the University, he conferred the degree of D.C.L. on Lord Stanley, his son)—I fear that I am about to do an unwise thing. When, in an hour of paternal weakness, I accepted your invitation to address the Bodley Society on *Style*, it escaped me that it was a subject with which undergraduates have but small concern. And now I find myself talking on a matter whereof I know very little, and could do you no good even if I knew much, in presence of an illustrious historian, to say nothing of your own Head, who was an acknowledged master of English, when my own literary style aspired to nothing more elegant than the dry forms of pleadings and deeds.

Every one knows how futile for any actual result are those elaborate disquisitions on Style which some of the most consummate masters have amused themselves in compiling, but which serve at best to show how quite hackneyed truisms can be graced by an almost miraculous neatness of phrase. It is in vain to enjoin on us 'propriety,' 'justness of expression,' 'suitability of our language to the subject we treat,' and all the

commonplaces which the schools of Addison and of Johnson in the last century promulgated as canons of good style. 'Proper words in proper places,' says Swift, 'make the true definition of a style.' 'Each phrase in its right place,' says Voltaire. Well! Swift and Voltaire knew how to do this with supreme skill; but it does not help us, if they cannot teach their art. *How* are we to know what is the *proper* word? *How* are we to find the *right* place? And even a greater than Swift or Voltaire is not much more practical as a teacher. 'Suit the action to the word, and the word to the action,' says Hamlet. 'Be not too tame neither. Let your own discretion be your tutor.' Can you trust your own discretion? Have undergraduates this discretion? And how could I, in presence of your College authority, suggest that you should have no tutor but your own discretion?

All this is as if a music-master were to say to a pupil, Sing always in tune and with the *right* intonation, and whatever you do, produce your voice in the *proper* way! Or, to make myself more intelligible to you here, it is as if W. G. Grace were to tell you, Play a 'yorker' in the *right* way, and place the ball in the *proper* spot with reference to the field! We know that neither the art of acting, nor of singing, nor of cricket can be taught by general commonplaces of this sort. And good prose is so far like cricket that the W. G.'s of literature, after ten or twenty 'centuries,' can tell you nothing more than this—to place your words in the right spot, and to choose the proper word, according to the 'field' that you have before you.

The most famous essay on Style, I suppose, is that by one of the greatest wizards who ever used language —I mean the *Ars Poetica* of Horace, almost every line

of which has become a household word in the educated world. But what avail his inimitable epigrams in practice? Who is helped by being told not to draw a man's head on a horse's neck, or a beautiful woman with the tail end of a fish? 'Do not let brevity become obscurity; do not let your mountain in labour bring forth a mouse; turn over your Greek models night and day; your compositions must be not only correct, but must give delight, touch the heart,' and so forth, and so forth. All these imperishable maxims, as clean cut as a sardonyx gem—these 'chestnuts,' as you call them in the slang of the day—serve as hard nuts for a translator to crack, and as handy mottoes at the head of an essay; but they are barren of any solid food as the shell of a walnut.

Then Voltaire, perhaps the greatest master of prose in any modern language, wrote an essay on Style, in the same vein of epigrammatic platitude. No declamation, says he, in a work on physics. No jesting in a treatise on mathematics. Well! but did Douglas Jerrold himself ever try to compose a Comic Trigonometry; and could another Charles Lamb find any fun in Spencer's First Principles? A fine style, says Voltaire, makes anything delightful; but it is exceedingly difficult to acquire, and very rarely found. And all he has to say is, 'Avoid grandiloquence, confusion, vulgarity, cheap wit, and colloquial slang in a tragedy.' He might as well say, Take care to be as strong as Sandow, and as active as Prince Ranjitsinhji, and whatever you do, take care not to grow a nose like Cyrano de Bergerac in the new play!

An ingenious professor of literature has lately ventured to commit himself to an entire treatise on Style, wherein he has propounded everything that

can usefully be said about this art, in a style which illustrates things that you should avoid. At the end of his book he declares that style cannot be taught. This is true enough; but if this had been the first, instead of the last, sentence of his piece, the book would not have been written at all. I remember that, when I stood for the Hertford Scholarship, we had to write a Latin epigram on the thesis—

Omnia liberius nullo poscente—
—fatemur, (I replied—)
Carmina cur poscas, carmine si sit opus?

And so I say now. Style cannot be taught. And this perhaps puts out of court the professor's essay and no doubt my own also. Nothing practical can be said about Style. And no good can come to a young student by being anxious about Style. None of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature; no! nor one gem to his English prose, unless nature has endowed him with that rare gift—a subtle ear for the melody of words, a fastidious instinct for the connotations of a phrase.

You will, of course, understand that I am speaking of Style in that higher sense as it was used by Horace, Swift, Voltaire, and great writers, that is, Style as an element of permanent literature. It is no doubt very easy by practice and good advice to gain a moderate facility in writing current language, and even to get the trick of turning out lively articles and smart reviews. ''Tis as easy as lying; govern these ventages with your finger and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music'—quite up to the pitch of the journals and the magazines of our day, of which we are all proud. But this is a

poor trade; and it would be a pity to waste your precious years of young study by learning to play on the literary 'recorders.' You may be taught to fret them. You will not learn to make them speak!

There are a few negative precepts, quite familiar common form, easy to remember, and not difficult to observe. These are all that any manual can lay down. The trouble comes in when we seek to apply them. What is it that is artificial, incongruous, obscure? How are we to be simple? Whence comes the music of language? What is the magic that can charm into life the apt and inevitable word that lies hidden somewhere at hand—so near and yet so far—so willing and yet so coy—did we only know the talisman which can awaken it? This is what no teaching can give us—what skilful tuition and assiduous practice can but improve in part, and even that only for the chosen few.

About Style, in the higher sense of the term, I think the young student should trouble himself as little as possible. When he does, it too often becomes the art of clothing thin ideas in well-made garments. To gain skill in expression before he has got thoughts or knowledge to express, is somewhat premature; and to waste in the study of form those irrevocable years which should be absorbed in the study of things, is mere decadence and fraud. The young student—*ex hypothesi*—has to learn, not to teach. His duty is to digest knowledge, not to popularise it and carry it abroad. It is a grave mental defect to parade an external polish far more mature than the essential matter within. Where the learner is called on to express his thoughts in formal compositions—and the less he does this the better—it is enough that he put

his ideas or his knowledge (if he has any) in clear and natural terms. But the less he labours the flow of his periods the more truly is he the honest learner, the less is his risk of being the smug purveyor of the crudities with which he has been crammed, the further is he from becoming one of those voluble charlatans whom the idle study of language so often breeds.

I look with sorrow on the habit which has grown up in the university since my day (in the far-off fifties)—the habit of making a considerable part of the education of the place to turn on the art of serving up gobbets of prepared information in essays more or less smooth and correct—more or less successful imitations of the viands that are cooked for us daily in the press. I have heard that a student has been asked to write as many as seven essays in a week, a task which would exhaust the fertility of a Swift. The bare art of writing readable paragraphs in passable English is easy enough to master; one that steady practice and good coaching can teach the average man. But it is a poor art, which readily lends itself to harm. It leads the shallow ones to suppose themselves to be deep, the raw ones to fancy they are cultured, and it burdens the world with a deluge of facile commonplace. It is the business of a university to train the mind to think and to impart solid knowledge, not to turn out nimble penmen who may earn a living as the clerks and salesmen of literature.

Almost all that can be laid down as law about Style is contained in a sentence of Madame de Sévigné in her twentieth letter to her daughter. 'Ne quittez jamais le naturel,' she says; 'votre tour s'y est formé, et cela compose un style parfait.' I suppose I must translate this; for Madame de Sévigné is no subject

for modern research, and our *Alma Mater* is concerned only with dead languages and remote epochs. 'Never forsake what is natural,' she writes; 'you have moulded yourself in that vein, and this produces a perfect style.' There is nothing more to be said. Be natural, be simple, be yourself: shun artifices, tricks, fashions. Gain the tone of ease, plainness, self-respect. To thine own self be true. Speak out frankly that which you have thought out in your own brain and have felt within your own soul. This, and this alone, creates a perfect style, as she says who wrote the most exquisite letters the world has known.

And so Molière, a consummate master of language and one of the soundest critics of any age, in that immortal scene of his *Misanthrope*, declares the euphuistic sonnets of the Court to be mere play of words, pure affectation, not worth a snatch from a peasant's song. That is not the way in which nature speaks, cries Alceste—*J'aime mieux ma mie*—that is how the heart gives utterance, without *colifichets*, with no quips and cranks of speech, very dear to fancy, and of very liberal conceit. And Sainte-Beuve cites an admirable saying: 'All peasants have style.' They speak as nature prompts. They have never learned to play with words; they have picked up no tricks, mannerisms, and affectation like Osric and Oronte in the plays. They were not trained to write essays, and never got veterans to discourse to them on Style. Yet, as Sainte-Beuve says, they have style, because they have human nature, and they have never tried to get outside the natural, the simple, the homely. It is the secret of Wordsworth, as it was of Goldsmith, as it was of Homer.

Those masters of style of whom I have spoken were

almost all French—Molière, Madame de Sévigné, Voltaire, Sainte-Beuve. Style, in truth, is a French art; there is hardly any other style in prose. I doubt if any English prose, when judged by the canons of perfect style, can be matched with the highest triumphs of French prose. The note of the purest French is a serene harmony of tone, an infallible nicety of keeping, a brightness and point never spasmodic, never careless, never ruffled, like the unvarying manner of a gentleman who is a thorough man of the world. Even our best English will sometimes grow impetuous, impatient, or slack, as if it were too much trouble to maintain an imperturbable air of quite inviolable good-breeding. In real life no people on earth, or perhaps we ought to say in Europe, in this surpass the English gentleman. In prose literature it is a French gift, and seems given as yet to the French alone. Italians, Spaniards, and Russians have an uncertain, casual, and fitful style, and Germans since Heine have no style at all.

Whilst we have hundreds of men and women to-day who write good English, and one or two who have a style of their own, our French critics will hardly admit that we show any example of the purest style when judged by their own standard of perfection. They require a combination of simplicity, ease, charm, precision, and serenity of tone, together with the memorable phrase and inimitable felicity which stamp the individual writer, and yet are obvious and delightful to every reader. Renan had this; Pierre Loti has it; Anatole France has it. But it is seldom that we read a piece of current English and feel it to be exquisite in form, apart from its substance, refreshing as a work of art, and yet hall-marked from the mint of the one particular author. We have hall-marks enough,

it is true, only too noisily conspicuous on the plate; but are they refreshing and inspiring? are they works of art? How is it that our poetry, even our minor poetry of the day, has its own felicitous harmony of tone, whilst our prose is notoriously wanting in that mellow refinement of form which the French call Style?

If I hazard a few words about some famous masters of language, I must warn you that judgments of this kind amount to little more than the likes and dislikes of the critic himself. There are no settled canons, and no accepted arbiter, of the elegances of prose. It is more or less a matter of personal taste, even more than it is in verse. I never doubt that the greatest master of prose in recorded history is Plato. He alone (like Homer in poetry) is perfect. He has every mood, and all are faultless. He is easy, lucid, graceful, witty, pathetic, imaginative by turns; but in all kinds he is natural and inimitably sweet. He is never obscure, never abrupt, never tedious, never affected. He shows us as it were his own Athene, wisdom incarnate in immortal radiance of form.

Plato alone is faultless. I will not allow any Roman to be perfect. Cicero even in his letters is wordy, rhetorical, academic. Livy is too consciously painting in words, too sonorous and diffuse for perfection; as Tacitus carries conciseness into obscurity and epigram into paradox. Of Latin prose, for my own part, I value most the soldierly simplicity of Cæsar, though we can hardly tell if he could be witty, graceful, pathetic, and fantastic as we see these gifts in Plato.

One of the most suggestive points in the history of prose is Boccaccio's *Decamerone*, where a style of strange fascination suddenly starts into life with hardly any earlier models, nay, two or three centuries earlier than

organic prose in any of the tongues of Europe. For many generations the exquisite ease and melody of Boccaccio's language found no rival in any modern nation, nor had it any rival in Italy, and we have no evidence that anything in Italy had prepared the way for it. It is far from a perfect style, for it is often too fluid, loose, and voluminous for mature prose; but as a first effort towards an orderly array of lucid narrative, it is an amazing triumph of the Italian genius for art.

Prose, as you all know, is always and everywhere a plant of much later growth than poetry. Plato came four or five centuries after Homer; Tacitus came two centuries later than Lucretius; Machiavelli came two centuries after Dante; Voltaire a century after Corneille; Addison a century after Shakespeare. And while the prose of Boccaccio, with all its native charm, can hardly be called an organic, mature, and mellow style, in poetry, for nearly a century before Boccaccio, Dante and the minor lyrists of Italy had reached absolute perfection of rhythmical form.

Although fairly good prose is much more common than fairly good verse, yet I hold that truly fine prose is more rare than truly fine poetry. I trust that it will be counted neither a whim nor a paradox if I give it as a reason that mastery in prose is an art more difficult than mastery in verse. The very freedom of prose, its want of conventions, of settled prosody, of musical inspiration, give wider scope for failure and afford no beaten paths. Poetry glides swiftly down the stream of a flowing and familiar river, where the banks are always the helmsman's guide. Prose puts forth its lonely skiff upon a boundless sea, where a multitude of strange and different crafts are cutting about in contrary directions. At any rate, the higher triumphs of

prose come later and come to fewer than do the great triumphs of verse.

When I lately had to study a body of despatches and State papers of the latter half of the sixteenth century, written in six modern languages of Europe, I observed that the Italian alone in that age was a formed and literary language, at the command of all educated men and women, possessed of organic canons and a perfectly mature type. The French, German, Dutch, English, and Spanish of that age, as used for practical ends, were still in the state of a language held in solution before it assumes a crystallised form. Even the men who wrote correct Latin could not write their own language with any real command. At the death of Tennyson, we may remember, it was said that no less than sixty-two poets were thought worthy of the wreath of bay. Were there six writers of prose whom even a log-rolling confederate would venture to hail as a possible claimant of the crown? Assiduous practice in composing neat essays has turned out of late ten thousand men and women who can put together very pleasant prose. It has not turned out one living master in prose as Tennyson was master in verse.

I have spoken of Voltaire as perhaps the greatest master of prose in any modern language, but this does not mean that he is perfect, and without qualification or want. His limpid clearness, ease, sparkle, and inexhaustible self-possession have no rival in modern tongues, and are almost those of Plato himself. But he is no Plato; he never rises into the pathos, imagination, upper air of the empyrean, to which the mighty Athenian can soar at will. Voltaire is never tedious, wordy, rhetorical, or obscure; and this can be said of hardly any other modern but Heine and Swift. My

edition of Voltaire is in sixty volumes, of which some forty are prose; and in all those twenty thousand pages of prose not one is dull or laboured. We could not say this of the verse. But I take *Candide* or *Zadig* to be the high-water mark of easy French prose, wanting no doubt in the finer elements of pathos, dignity, and power. And for this reason many have preferred the prose of Rousseau, of George Sand, of Renan, though all of these are apt at times to degenerate into garrulity and gush. There was no French prose, says Voltaire, before Pascal; and there has been none of the highest flight since Renan. In the rest of Europe perfect prose has long been as rare as the egg of the great auk.

In spite of the splendour of Bacon and of Milton, of Jeremy Taylor and of Hooker, and whatever be the virility of Bunyan and Dryden, I cannot hold that the age of mature English prose had been reached until we come to Defoe, Swift, Addison, Berkeley, and Goldsmith. These are the highest types we have attained. Many good judges hold Swift to be our Voltaire, without defect or equal. I should certainly advise the ambitious essayist to study Swift for instruction, by reason of the unfailing clearness, simplicity, and directness of his style. But when we come to weigh him by the highest standard of all, we find Swift too uniformly pedestrian, too dry; wanting in variety, in charm, in melody, in thunder, and in flash. The grandest prose must be like the vault of heaven itself, passing from the freshness of dawn to the warmth of a serene noon, and anon breaking forth into a crashing storm. Swift sees the sun in one uniform radiance of cool light, but it never fills the air with warmth, nor does it ever light the welkin with fire.

Addison, with all his mastery of tone, seems afraid to give his spirit rein. *Il s'écoute quand il parle*: and this, by the way, is the favourite sin of our best moderns. We see him pause at the end of each felicitous sentence to ask himself if he has satisfied all the canons as to propriety of diction. Even in the *Spectator* we never altogether forget the author of *Cato*. Now, we perceive no canons of good taste, no tragic buskin, no laborious modulations in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, which in its own vein is the most perfect type of eighteenth-century prose. Dear old Goldie! There is ease, pellucid simplicity, wit, pathos. I doubt if English prose has ever gone further, or will go further or higher.

After all I have said, I need not labour the grounds on which I feel Johnson, Burke, Gibbon, Macaulay, and Carlyle to be far from perfect as writers and positively fatal if taken as models. Old Samuel's Ciceronian pomp has actually dimmed our respect for his good sense and innate robustness of soul. Burke was too great an orator to be a consummate writer, as he was too profound a writer to be a perfect orator. Gibbon's imperial eagles pass on in one unending triumph, with the resounding blare of brazen trumpets, till we weary of the serried legions and grow dizzy with the show. And as to Macaulay and Carlyle, they carry emphasis to the point of exhaustion; for the peer bangs down his fist to clinch every sentence, and 'Sartor' never ceases his uncouth gesticulations and grimace.

In our own century, Charles Lamb and Thackeray, I think, come nearest to Voltaire and Madame de Sévigné in purity of diction, in clearness, ease, grace, and wit. But a living writer—now long silent and

awaiting his summons to the eternal silence—had powers which, had he cared to train them before he set about to reform the world, would have made him the noblest master who ever used the tongue of Milton. Need I name the versatile genius who laboured here in Oxford so long and with such success? In the mass of his writings John Ruskin has struck the lyre of prose in every one of its infinite notes. He has been lucid, distinct, natural, fanciful, humorous, satiric, majestic, mystical, and prophetic by turns as the spirit moved within him. No Englishman—hardly Milton himself—has ever so completely mastered the tonic resources of English prose, its majesty and wealth of rhythm, the flexibility, mystery, and infinitude of its mighty diapason.

Alas! the pity of it. These incomparable descants are but moments and interludes, and are too often chanted forth in mere wantonness of emotion. Too often they lead us on to formless verbosity and a passionate rhetoric, such as blind even temperate critics to the fact, that it is possible to pick out of the books of John Ruskin whole pages which in harmony, power, and glow have no match in the whole range of our prose.

And now I know I must not end without hazarding a few practical hints—what betting men and undergraduates call 'tips'—for general remarks upon literature have little interest for those whose mind runs on sports, and perhaps even less for those whose mind is absorbed in the schools. But as there are always some who dream of a life of 'letters,' an occupation already too crowded and far from inviting at the best, they will expect me to tell them how I think they may acquire a command of Style. I know no reason why

they should, and I know no way they could set about it. But, supposing one has something to say—something that it concerns the world to know—and this, for a young student, is a considerable claim, 'a large order,' I think he calls it in the current dialect, all I have to tell him is this: Think it out quite clearly in your own mind, and then put it down in the simplest words that offer, just as if you were telling it to a friend, but dropping the tags of the day with which your spoken discourse would naturally be garnished. Be familiar, but by no means vulgar. At any rate, be easy, colloquial if you like, but shun those vocables which come to us across the Atlantic, or from Newmarket and Whitechapel, with which the gilded youth and journalists 'up-to-date' love to salt their language. Do not make us 'sit up' too much, or always 'take a back seat'; do not ask us to 'ride for a fall,' to 'hurry up,' or 'boom it all we know.' Nothing is more irritating in print than the iteration of slang, and those stale phrases with which 'the half-baked' seek to convince us that they are 'in the swim' and 'going strong'—if I may borrow the language of the day—that Volapük of the smart and knowing world. It offends me like the reek of last night's tobacco.

It is a good rule for a young writer to avoid more than twenty or thirty words without a full stop, and not to put more than two commas in each sentence, so that its clauses should not exceed three. This, of course, only in practice. There is no positive law. A fine writer can easily place in a sentence one hundred words, and five or six minor clauses with their proper commas and colons. Ruskin was wont to toss off two or three hundred words and five-and-twenty commas without a pause. But even in the hand of such a

magician this ends in failure, and is really grotesque in effect, for no such sentence can be spoken aloud. A beginner can seldom manage more than twenty-five words in one sentence with perfect ease. Nearly all young writers, just as men did in the early ages of prose composition, drift into ragged, preposterous, inorganic sentences, without beginning, middle, or end, which they ought to break into two or three.

And then they hunt up terms that are fit for science, poetry, or devotion. They affect 'evolution' and 'factors,' 'the inter-action of forces,' 'the co-ordination of organs'; or else everything is 'weird,' or 'opalescent,' 'debonair,' and 'enamelled,' so that they will not call a spade a spade. I do not say, stick to Saxon words and avoid Latin words as a law of language, because English now consists of both: good and plain English prose needs both. We seldom get the highest poetry without a large use of Saxon, and we hardly reach precise and elaborate explanation without Latin terms. Try to turn *precise* and *elaborate explanation* into strict Saxon; and then try to turn 'Our Father, which art in heaven' into pure Latin words. No! current English prose—not the language of poetry or of prayer—must be of both kinds, Saxon and Latin. But wherever a Saxon word is enough, use it; because if it have all the fulness and the precision you need, it is the more simple, the more direct, the more homely.

Never quote anything that is not apt and new. Those stale citations of well-worn lines give us a cold shudder, as does a pun at a dinner-party. A familiar phrase from poetry or Scripture may pass when imbedded in your sentence. But to show it round as a nugget which you have just picked up is the innocent freshman's snare. Never imitate any writer, however good.

All imitation in literature is a mischief, as it is in art. A great and popular writer ruins his followers and mimics, as did Raffaelle and Michel Angelo; and when he founds a school of style, he impoverishes literature more than he enriches it. Johnson, Macaulay, Carlyle, Dickens, Ruskin have been the cause of flooding us with cheap copies of their special manner. And even now Meredith, Stevenson, Swinburne, and Pater lead the weak to ape their airs and graces. All imitation in literature is an evil. I say to you, as Mat Arnold said to me (who surely needed no such warning), 'Flee Carlylese as the very devil!' Yes, flee Carlylese, Ruskinese, Meredithese, and every other *ese*, past, present, and to come. A writer whose style invites imitation so far falls short of being a true master. He becomes the parent of caricature, and frequently he gives lessons in caricature himself.

Though you must never imitate any writer, you may study the best writers with care. And for study choose those who have founded no school, who have no special and imitable style. Read Pascal and Voltaire in French; Swift, Hume, and Goldsmith in English; and of the moderns, I think, Thackeray and Froude. Ruskin is often too rhapsodical for a student; Meredith too whimsical; Stevenson too 'precious,' as they love to call it; George Eliot too laboriously enamelled and erudite. When you cannot quietly enjoy a picture for the curiosity aroused by its so-called 'brushwork,' the painting may be a surprising sleight-of-hand, but is not a masterpiece.

Read Voltaire, Defoe, Swift, Goldsmith, and you will come to understand how the highest charm of words is reached without your being able to trace any special element of charm. The moment you begin to pick

out this or that felicity of phrase, this or that sound of music in the words, and directly it strikes you as eloquent, lyrical, pictorial—then the charm is snapped. The style may be fascinating, brilliant, impressive ; but it is not perfect.

Of melody in style I have said nothing ; nor indeed can anything practical be said. It is a thing infinitely subtle, inexplicable, and rare. If your ear does not hear the false note, the tautophony or the cacophony in the written sentence, as you read it or frame it silently to yourself, and hear it thus inaudibly long before your eye can pick it forth out of the written words, nay, even when the eye fails to localise it by analysis at all—then you have no inborn sense of the melody of words, and be quite sure that you can never acquire it. One living Englishman has it in the highest form ; for the melody of Ruskin's prose may be matched with that of Milton and Shelley. I hardly know any other English prose which retains the ring of that ethereal music—echoes of which are more often heard in our poetry than in our prose. Nay, since it is beyond our reach, wholly incommunicable, defiant of analysis and rule, it may be more wise to say no more.

Read Swift, Defoe, Goldsmith, if you care to know what is pure English. I need hardly tell you to read another and a greater Book. The Book which begot English prose still remains its supreme type. The English Bible is the true school of English literature. It possesses every quality of our language in its highest form—except for scientific precision, practical affairs, and philosophic analysis. It would be ridiculous to write an essay on metaphysics, a political article, or a novel in the language of the Bible. Indeed, it would

be ridiculous to write anything at all in the language of the Bible. But if you care to know the best that our literature can give in simple noble prose—mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Holy Scriptures in the English tongue.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BOOK TROTTER: A DIALOGUE

Oxford: The Garden of St. John's.
WISEMAN, *of Balliol*; PAPILLON, *of Christ Church.*

Wiseman. Well! old fellow! where were you last night? You never turned up at our Plato grind. We were on that seventh book of the *Republic*, about the underground den and the screen which the marionette players have when they show their puppets. We should have liked your ingenious ideas about the parable of the Cave, for it is not so entirely obvious. Take a turn round the garden, and let us hear what became of you.

Papillon. I was much better employed. I did intend to have joined you over the Plato; but as I came up from the House, I dropped in at the Union to see the paper. There I stumbled on a sort of address that some fellow in Parliament had been making about reading. I skipped a good deal, for it was rather a long grind; but he says, read just as the whim takes you. So I took up *King Solomon's Mines*, and read that for an hour. There's an underground den in that, and some jerking about of puppets. Plato might have bored me; so I read Rider Haggard for my own pleasure, as the M.P. advises.

W. And you call that pleasure?

P. Well! it's as good as Mayne Reid, and what

more do you want? But I got tired of that old hag in the cavern, and took up a volume of Darwin's *Letters*. I read something about Evolution, but it seemed rather rot. And then I tried old Lecky's new volumes—it 's easy reading, you know—and I very nearly fell asleep over his Mirabeau and Pitt. But I could not stand much of a fellow who takes seven or eight volumes over a hundred years. Why, at that rate the history of England from Alfred would want about eighty volumes! So then I took a pull at Swinburne's *Locrine*—awfully pretty, but you can't stand more than six ice-creams at a sitting; and after a few pages, I settled into Zola's *La Terre*.

W. And you call that pleasure?

P. No! Beastly! But you must see something of whatever comes out nowadays. Last Long, you know, at Paris I went down the sewers with a guide to see what it was like. So I always read Zola to see what is the last new thing in smells, for I am more eclectic than you are. By that time 'Tom' had gone a long while, and I felt in no mood for Plato, so I finished with the *Sporting Life* over my pipe.

W. I can well believe you were in no mood for Plato; and Zola would not help us to explain *τὰς τῶν σκευαστῶν σκιάς*. How are you going to get up your *Republic*?

P. Oh! I shall cram up likely bits from Jowett in the last term, and with my sixth form Greek I shall do. The Governor, you know, does not want me to go in for Honours. He says I am to prepare for Parliament and public life, and get all the general information I can. So I turn over any book, old or new, just as it comes; and I never read a line further when it begins to bore me.

W. I know that you have read as many books as any ten of us together. But, my dear 'Pap,' did you ever read a book from title to 'finis' in your life?

P. No! why should I? I read to amuse me.

W. And did you ever read a book a third time through in your life?

P. No! nor twice. Why should I? I like something fresh.

W. What! Not Milton's *Lyrics*, nor Bacon's *Essays*, nor *Tom Jones*?

P. Pooh! I read all that at school. One wants something fresh to amuse one—*Half-hours with Obscure Authors*, or a Realist novel in a yellow cover.

W. What a Don Juan among the books you must be! Flirtations *mille e tre* with the literature of every country in Europe. Do the gardens of this old place never bore you at all, *Giovannino mio*?

P. Indeed they do! They are as dull as a prison yard. The everlasting old grey roof, the conventional mullions in the oriels of Laud's library there, eternally posing at the end of the formal lawn, weary me as much as the nightingales in May. Oxford would be a monotonous place were it all like this; if one had not Keble and the Taylor Gallery.

W. And how far do you carry your gospel of the butterfly: into art as well as books? Did you ever cultivate your taste in music—I know you have a flute and a pretty tenor voice? Do you take any pains with your natural gifts?

P. God forbid that I should pick or choose! I leave pedants to *cultivate* their taste, which ends in Wagner and all that is dismal. No! I take music as it comes—symphonies, waltzes, sonatas, *Carnaval de Venise*, and *Two Lovely Black Eyes*. They all are music; any

of them please a man with an ear; and one is as pleasant to hear as the other.

W. So your idea in music is a *pot pourri* by Dan Godfrey, or a *caprice avec souvenirs variés* by Offenbach?

P. I like them just as they come. I am quite as much at home with Beethoven and Bach and that, as with 'Gus Harris's pantomime or a promenade concert. Pleasure, amusement, and variety are the object of art; and I call the man a pedant who prefers a symphony to a patter song or a good breakdown.

W. You don't think that is desultory now?

P. And a good thing too. Life is not worth living unless it is desultory. And the business of art is to gratify all tastes in turn.

W. As a confectioner does. Well, and what do you say to pictures? Are you equally omnivorous in a gallery of paintings?

P. Yes. I never could stand the nonsense about high art, ancient masters, and principles of taste. I have seen most of the galleries in Europe; and I like any school, and the telling pictures of all schools, in turn.

W. Do you never spend a wet afternoon in the Taylor Gallery, to study the Raphael drawings or Michael Angelo's designs?

P. Oh! I saw them one morning in my first term, when our people came up to do Oxford; and very curious they are. But as to *studying* them, the fellows who do that are narrowing their taste. That is pedantry. *Ars longa, vita brevis.* I am for knowing something of every one. Raphael is very well, and so is Doré. Titian was a clever man, and so is Verestchagin.

W. Come, now, do you mean to say that all your study of picture galleries ends in your placing Doré on a level with Raphael?

P. Dear me, no! As a matter of criticism or estimate, I can see the difference, and write about it, I dare say, as the critic fellows do, by the column. But in order to enjoy, you must pass from one to the other; see the merit of all styles, and the skill of all methods. Doré has something which Raphael never had; and Verestchagin can teach Titian a thing or two in corpses.

W. And Verestchagin's corpses give you a new zest for Raphael's Madonnas?

P. Well, I like them all—Fra Angelico and Goya, Sandro Botticelli and Salvator, Giotto and Delacroix, Turner and Horace Vernet—they all have a way of their own. Variety is the end of art; and curiosity is the note of culture.

W. And you say the same in architecture, I suppose? Here, now, in Oxford, are you just as catholic in your tastes?

P. Yes! I know no place like Oxford for a happy confusion of styles. The Greek grotesque of the Taylor Museum beside the sham thirteenth century of the Martyrs' Memorial: round arch, pointed arch, ogee, and architrave—all side by side; Norman, Early Pointed, Decorated, Perpendicular, Debased, Elizabethan, Jacobean, Queen Anne, Georgian, Victorian, Churchwarden, Jacksonian, and Omnium Gatherum styles—all get a chance in turn, and all have something of their own. I am against any *Index Expurgatorius* in art.

W. What a delightful mood to have, an equal capacity of enjoying everything! And do you extend this to

every body as well as every thing? When you go down to these balls, for instance, where I hear you are so much in request, do you take your partners for a waltz just as they come: plain, dull, heavy-footed, and all?

P. God forbid! My dear fellow, one must draw the line somewhere. I choose my partners from the girls I like best.

W. So you have an *Index Expurgatorius* of young ladies, eh?

P. Well, I like jolly partners best, of course.

W. And fellows at your club, or for a shooting-party, or at a country-house, and so on. Do you go anywhere you are asked, and hob-nob with any one you meet?

P. What on earth do you mean? I am rather careful than otherwise not to get into a slow house, or to sit down to a shady dinner.

W. So that you are particular as to the people with whom you pass your time, the girls with whom you dance, the dishes which you eat; but you don't care a straw with what book you pass your evening, what kind of a man it is whose ideas you are taking in, or what is the kind of stuff with which you are filling your mind? Are you not rather more careful about your stomach than about your brain?

P. Well, a bad dish spoils a whole dinner, and two heavy partners would ruin the best ball.

W. And yet what you call a 'beastly' book of Zola's or a shilling dreadful gives you a really pleasant evening, you told me, and saved you from Plato's rot?

P. Oh, I intend to finish the *Republic* some day; but there are such heaps of new books which a fellow has to look into that it is not easy to find time. I am

not going to have anything to do with your precious *Index Expurgatorius.*

W. Yes! that is what fellows say who want to call names, and are hard up for an argument. When you object to make friends of every man you meet in the street, I suppose you are making an *Index Expurgatorius* of the whole human race?

P. Come now, what is it that you want me to do?

W. Why, simply to choose your books with a little of the care which you now so wisely show in choosing your partners and friends. To hurry on round the galleries of Europe is to see a great deal and to know nothing; to get a smattering of art and to enjoy nothing truly. Books are not so different from art, nor are books or art so unlike human nature and life. To feel poetry deeply, to love literature nobly, you must keep your brain from the everlasting gabble and the *assafœtida* of modern carrion. He who is ever ready for Offenbach will never be a lover of Beethoven; and a perpetual round of Bond Street galleries will at last spoil the eye for Titian. You had better dance all night with a dairymaid, and sup with a lot of betting-ring men, than work through Mudie's list of new novels.

P. Come, old man, I shall go back to college. I can stand no more of this. It's worse than going for a walk with Jowett. By the way, what are you going to do with yourself next Long?

W. I am going with Turner of New to spend my autumn in Venice: we want to study the history, as well as the art, archæology, and language. I shall take my Ruskins; and with the Perkins, Freeman, and Mrs. Jameson, we shall do the churches thoroughly. Last Long, you know, I did the same thing in Florence: the only way to know anything about Italy is to take

it province by province. What do you say to joining us?

P. Oh, I have made my plans. I never can stand a foreign town for more than a few days; I am always wanting to get on. I am going in for Cook's tour round the world. We go by the Bay, touch at Gib., stay a day at each of the Mediterranean ports, have twelve hours in the Eternal City, run up to the Acropolis by the tram, half a day at Cairo and the Pyramids, Red Sea, Ceylon, India, China, Japan, and back by San Francisco and the Grand Trunk, Niagara, New York, and all that, and home again in ninety days. One should see something of everything, you know.

W. A regular Jules Verne round! My dear fellow, you will turn into a professional globe-trotter. Well, bye-bye, I shall not go with you. But I suppose it is the right thing to do for a confirmed book-trotter.

CHAPTER IX

LAMB AND KEATS

(An address on the unveiling of the portraits of Lamb and Keats at the Passmore Edwards Free Library at Edmonton)

IN offering to the fine library and literary institution in which we meet to-day the medallion portraits in bronze of Charles Lamb and of John Keats, the founder has still further enlarged his noble gift, and has added to the people of Edmonton a new claim on their grateful acknowledgments. This handsome foundation is but one of many scores of others which will long record to our descendants the name of Passmore Edwards.

These nurseries of thought and culture which will bear his name (as churches in Rome are so proudly and vainly inscribed—*ex munificentia Sexti*, or *Pauli*) are the munificent gifts to his fellow-citizens of one who is himself a member of the literary order and the founder of a new era in journalism. It is an example of public spirit which is far more common in the United States than in Europe. In England, our magnates of high rank and vast possessions think that they can best gratify their fellow-citizens by exhibiting their own magnificence, and can best advance the public taste by admitting them to view their galleries or their race-horses. The wealthy citizens of America are more wont to devote their abundance to the public, and have given

a large part of the universities, libraries, museums, and observatories in the States. I remember writing for an American review a little essay on 'The Uses of Rich Men in the Commonwealth'; and I described the public gifts common at Athens and at Rome. The Athenians called them *Leiturgies*, and most of the immortal dramas of Athens, and many of the exquisite remains of architecture that we see to-day, were the free gifts to their fellow-citizens of rich and patriotic patrons, such as was Herodes Atticus in the time of the empire. The example is too rare in England—almost unknown in London—where men of wealth are often willing to subscribe to a hospital or an institution, but where we seldom find any man willing to devote a large fortune to some truly munificent institution. Let us hope that in course of time the south of England and its capital may receive such benefactions as are common in America, and not unknown in our northern counties, and that London, too, may count its Passmore Edwardses to follow the example of the Herodes Attici of old.

We are about to unveil the bronze images of Lamb and Keats, whose memory is kept green in this place. Charles Lamb passed the close of his life and died in a cottage hard by this spot—a cottage happily still untouched in its primitive simplicity. He is buried in the parish churchyard within a few minutes' walk, and a gravestone over his coffin and a marble monument in the church record his life in the parish. John Keats, born in London, and living his short life in the northern suburbs, passed some time in a house still standing unaltered within a few yards of the cottage of Lamb, and then went to live at Hampstead, within a short walk of this spot. He is buried in the Protestant

cemetery at Rome, beneath the shadow of her ancient walls, where lies the heart of Shelley—*cor cordium.*

Both Lamb and Keats toiled and dreamed, knew intense joy and acute sorrow, in the early years of this nineteenth century, in the reign of George III. Three, and even four, generations have come and gone since their time. Keats died at twenty-five, before the birth of most of us here to-day. Charles Lamb died at fifty-nine, within my own lifetime, and is still remembered by old men yet alive. Nearly a century has passed since the early work of Lamb, and some eighty years since that of Keats. Yet to-day the fame of both stands higher than it stood in their lifetime or at any time since their deaths. It will be for the twentieth century to judge, at the centenaries of their death in 1934 and 1921 respectively, what will be their ultimate rank in English prose and poetry. It is too soon, perhaps, for us to dogmatise with confidence. For in general it is a good rule to observe that, when a hundred years have come and gone since a writer inscribed *Finis* in the book of his earthly life, the time has come when he can be judged fairly and finally in the roll of English letters—all his own friends and his own enemies removed, the novelty of his gifts faded away, the fashions and prejudices of the day long changed, and a strong presumption established that, if he be still lively in the memory of a fourth and a fifth generation after his own, it must be due to some real originality and power. We will not attempt to anticipate the verdict of posterity, and to-day let us avoid all hyperboles and eulogiums. Two men of genius have been associated with the traditions of this district. Living men have known them here. And we testify to-day that those who dwell here and who love letters

have not forgotten them nor the thoughts they left to the ages to come.

Both Lamb and Keats will be remembered (amidst all the differences which separate the humourist from the morbid poet), each for his peculiar, fascinating gift —Lamb for an inimitable genius of light and airy criticism, Keats for an inexhaustible spring of melodious and perfumed song. There is no second Lamb in prose; no second Keats in verse. Each has a hall-mark of his own on every product of his mint; unmistakable, incomparable, native; which no man can imitate, none can parody, no man can pirate, yet which could no more be repeated in English literature than we could turn out a new *Vicar of Wakefield* or a second *Lycidas*.

I am not comparing Lamb to Oliver Goldsmith nor Keats to Milton. I say no more than this, that Elia has his own rare charm just as dear old 'Goldie' had his special charm; that Keats has an inimitable lyric spell, as inimitable in its own way as was ever that of Milton himself. Let us avoid all trace of exaggeration in our praise. The true genius needs no such excess, gains nothing by it, and would scorn to receive it. It is too much the fashion when a memorial is set up, or a biography is issued, to use about the object of this honour the tone of extravagant eulogy, as if our history or our literature contained no other name so great. Those whose task it is to 'inaugurate' (as the newspapers affect to call it) a monument to a dead worthy, too often speak as if it were their bounden duty 'to lie like a tombstone.' This is not true reverence. It dishonours our dead worthy. We will not lie like a tombstone, nor even like a funeral sermon, which is sometimes hardly more veracious. Let us utter nothing but words of truth and soberness.

Neither Lamb nor Keats can claim a place in the very foremost ranks of our writers or poets. It would be untrue and unreal to pretend that they do. They have unique gifts: Lamb, as a delightful humourist, the very Ariel of critics, with a wonderful instinct for the older drama; Keats, as having an unrivalled gift of sensuous lyric. We do not assert that Lamb is one of the master-spirits of English thought, one of the fountain-heads of our literature. Nor is Keats, indeed, among the inmost circle of the blessed poets whose thrones are grouped round Shakespeare. Yet these two hold their own. There is no second Lamb; there is no other Keats.

In these days of so much hysterical enthusiasm in things of taste, of so much combative paradox, it may be as well to make it plainer in what sense I hesitate to claim for either the first rank. The first rank in prose, as in verse, is reserved for those who have embalmed great and virile thoughts in perfect form, who have a vast range of ideas, and have pierced to the roots of varied phases of nature and of life, who have given to after ages whole masses of immortal work, and who fire the brain and the heart of many millions, past, present, and to come. That is to say, the supreme seats are for work, wherein the thought is superior, or at least equal, to the form, wherein the thought is profound, large, various; where there is mass and volume of splendid achievement, power over vast numbers, all ages, races, and sympathies. This is eminently true of the Shakespeares, Dantes, Homers, and is more or less true of such men as Bacon, Milton, Chaucer, Fielding, Goethe, and Scott. In all of them we find profound insight, mighty imagination, vast range of experience and sympathy, mass of work, world-wide, universal spell and influence.

It would be ridiculous to claim anything of the kind for Keats or for Lamb. The vein of each is a simple streak of fine ore, of narrow limit and without pretension to inspire generations of men. Mass of work, variety of gift, profundity, wide knowledge of man and the world belong not to either. We could no more compare Keats with Shakespeare than we could compare Mont Blanc with one of its own snowy pinnacles, and we can no more go to Lamb for what we get from Bacon than we could expect to find the contents of a good library in a single volume. Now, if Lamb and Keats are worthy of the foremost rank, what rank do we reserve for Bacon and for Shakespeare? And mass of work, brain power, influence over ages and races belong to Spenser, to Chaucer, to Wordsworth, to Burns; yea, to Byron and Shelley amongst poets, as they do to Swift, Johnson, Goldsmith, Scott, in prose. And brain power, range of work, influence over mankind outweigh wit, fancy, and the mirth of the most airy and curious sympathy, as they certainly outweigh the most melodious poetry, where conception is lost and overpowered in music and passionate rapture.

These are the grounds whereon it would be criminal to indulge in shallow enthusiasms, and mischievous to exalt enchanting qualities of mere form over abiding contributions to the great literature of all time. We are perilously near to that decadence down to the 'silver age,' which seems to be the senility of all great epochs of literature, when delight in *form* supersedes the *substance* of prose or verse; when fashion dogmatises about *style*; when the fascination found in the way in which a thought is said, blinds some weak votaries to the thing that is said and even to the meaning of what

is said. Tennyson's exquisite graces have made us all so sensitive to artful modulations, and Stevenson's subtle enamels in prose have given such vogue to 'precious' phrases, that we are all apt to talk as if some lovely lines on a rosebud, or an ode on 'the first swallow,' could place their author on a level with Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and Milton's *Lyrics*, though no one imagines that their writer could have conceived a *Hamlet* or a *Paradise Lost*. Or, again, we talk as if some pellucid sense about an old play or a new poem could place the essayist in the rank of Bacon or Hume.

A truce to all such hectic extravagances when we dwell on the delightful things left us by these two men, so diverse in nature and yet so much akin in suffering and broken hopes. Needless to-day to rehearse the pangs and tragedies in the life of either, to speak of the low estate, scanty education, drudgery, and ill-health of Lamb, with the horrible catastrophe and life-long burden imposed on him by his sister's malady. Nor need we speak of Keats's life of struggle and sickness, his intense sensitiveness, his mad and hopeless passion, the agonies of his dying hours, and the fatality of death in early youth.

Still less need we pretend to weigh, to appraise, to criticise either of these men, or seek to forecast the place they will hold in the final roll of English literature. It is amply enough for us to-day that, perhaps all through this century, their work, so different, so rare, has been steadily gaining in the esteem of all good judges, so that we may say that we have reached a right estimate of both. No one compares them to each other, or dreams of offering any relative judgment about the two. It is enough to say—and this sums up

the case—each had a rare, unique, fascinating gift of his own.

As humorist Charles Lamb stands in the foremost rank, less poetic, less idyllic than Goldsmith, less sardonic than Swift, less graceful than Addison and Steele, less robust than Fielding, less many-sided than Thackeray, less creative than Dickens, but withal a man having a spark of the Falstaffian humour, that humour of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Antiquary*, the grand Homeric humour of the great imaginative masters of the Human Comedy. Not that I compare Lamb's sweet and simple Pan-pipe to these immortal conceptions. But he is of their kith and kin; he can use their mother tongue; he is free of their guild.

And how buoyant is his style! How artless, and yet what art, could we only get to see it! How pure, how natural, how jovial is the English of Elia! Let him who would study plain, easy prose read Lamb's *Essays* or *Letters*. You cannot copy or imitate them. They are inimitable, and yet so plain that a child can follow them. They well up straight from a gay, sympathetic, loving heart, as if the brain hardly aided in the act of expression. The quaint little parlour of Bay Cottage rings with his laughter! How kindly, how garrulous, how bright!—and yet written amid such cruel griefs, toils, anxieties, and disappointments.

John Keats presents a remarkable problem. His was far the shortest life in the whole roll of English literature (if we except the boy Chatterton, who was hardly a poet at all). Keats was but twenty-five years and four months old at his death. Now Shelley was thirty, and Byron was thirty-six, and they are the youngest of our poets. And neither Shelley nor Byron at the same age had written such poetry as Keats

had written before he was twenty-four. It would be difficult in all modern literature to name any one who had produced such exquisite work at so early an age. Keats's whole work was composed at an age earlier than that at which Milton wrote *Lycidas*, or Shakespeare wrote *Venus and Adonis.* In our thoughts about Keats, let us always remember that he was 'a wonderful lad' —an unformed, untrained, neuropathic youth of genius —whose whole achievement came earlier in life than that of almost any other man recorded in our literature, indeed, in any literature. I am inclined to think that in the whole series of men eminent in various ways in recorded history (unless we go to painters like Giotto and Raffaelle, or to musicians like Pergolesi, Mozart, and Bellini), no man has left such considerable work under the age of twenty-five as did Keats—'the wonderful lad.'

It is right to bear in mind that all we have of Keats were the first experiments of a genius who by the civil law was not yet *sui juris*, whose short life was a chronic fever, and whose aspirations and ideals were in constant flux. But we cannot assume, because in his first flight he left a few hundred of exquisite verses, that at fifty he would have been the peer of Shakespeare and Milton. Let us also remember that injudicious editors and admirers have preserved not only those horrible love-letters of his last agony—'those wild and wandering cries,' 'those confusions of a stricken youth,' we may say—but also much of the raw and tawdry stuff which Keats, like all men of genius, poured out in his first efforts to soar. Of all poets, perhaps (unless it be Byron, who had a mania for scribbling), Keats is the most unequal. Considering his extreme youth, and his shabby training, this was natural enough.

Keats can give us perfect gems like the *Ode to a Nightingale*, the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, some of the *Sonnets*, much of the *Lamia*, and most of the *Pot of Basil* (not a thousand lines in all), and then some gross failures in various experiments which ought not to be printed at all.

Almost all poets but Milton have left behind them much that is immeasurably below their best, and something very poor indeed. Shakespeare himself has done so, and Dryden, Pope, Byron, and Wordsworth are conspicuous examples of the same bathos. What wonder if Keats at twenty-two did this also? Even on an occasion when we meet to do honour to a delightful poet, I will not fall in with the hysterics of some eminent critics and tell you that Keats stands beside Shakespeare in the foremost ranks of our poets. We have far too much of this neuropathic mouthing in our day, which seems the age of the hyperboles of cliques and fanatics, and of exaggerated delight in some special beauty of phrase or note. It is enough for me that we find in Keats some odes of exquisite passion and charm, a delight in glow and colour that touches us like a canvas by Giorgione, a few short lyrics which stand in the everlasting lyrical triumphs of our tongue, a promise of command over the melody of verse, a power of painting in winged words which (if he had lived another twenty or thirty years) might have placed him well in the rank of poets somewhere below Milton and Shakespeare. *Might have done* this, if only promise were always followed by performance; if we could be sure that the nature of Keats as a man, his brain, his hold on truths and realities, equalled his mastery over language; if we did not too often feel, even in his best and latest work, that the instrument where-

from he wrung forth such luscious music, seemed endowed with magic gifts, so as ofttimes to dash itself free from the hands and consciousness of him who held it.

And now, before I pull the veils aside and show you Mr. Frampton's beautiful work, I will end with a moral (for I am one of those incorrigible people who are never easy till they get down to the *moral* of the thing), and there is a memorable lesson taught us by the lives of these two men. Here was Lamb, a man born in the class of office servants in the Temple, educated in the Bluecoat School, where he never reached the upper class, chained as a subordinate clerk in a public office, never much above indigence, afflicted with a terrible domestic calamity, and yet to-day recognised as one of the most exquisite writers of the age, and still one of the most accomplished critics of the older drama.

Again, here is Keats, the son of a livery-stable-keeper, apprenticed at fifteen to a Scotch surgeon, drudging at surgery till the age of twenty, struck down soon after with a mortal malady, poor all his life, unsettled, self-taught, wholly dependent on himself for guidance, which he sorely needed, and yet recognised as having, at the age of twenty-five, written sonnets which would not disgrace Milton, lyrics that Shelley might have owned, and letters that Byron could hardly surpass. Keats knew no Greek, and yet his *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, his *Lamia*, are redolent of the essence of Greek myths. Milton himself was hardly more truly Greek in imagination.

Here are two of our brightest men of genius, one a writer of exquisite prose, the other a poet endowed with the luscious note of a nightingale. Yet both were wholly bereft of any education of the official and

academic sort. They gave themselves the whole of the education they had, with scant leisure, meagre resources, cruel hindrances. How few indeed of our famous writers in prose or verse, even our men of learning or of science, owe their success to the conventional school and college curriculum! Not Shakespeare, certainly, nor Marlowe, nor Pope, nor Shelley, nor Byron, nor Burns, nor Scott. All of these made themselves, formed their own minds, their own ideals and form. And so, too, did Swift and Defoe, Goldsmith and Gibbon, Mill and Grote, Spencer and Darwin. Milton, Gray, and Johnson are the few examples of those who received complete academic training, and even they gave to themselves the best part of their own education.

You, too, may give yourselves your own education! Nay, you *must* do so! It is as true almost for those who are not endowed with genius, as it is for those who are, that education can only give us the means of training our own minds. You who have free use of such libraries as this, who can find evening schools, literary and scientific institutes, within a few miles of your home, have far more means of training the mind than ever had Lamb or Keats. Lamb had to beg, borrow, screw, and scheme to get sight of a 'Fletcher' or a 'Ben Jonson' or a 'Marlowe.' Keats quite worried a friend to lend him a *Faerie Queen*. If such men could have had the run of such a storehouse of standard literature as is contained on the shelves around us, with what rapture would they have fallen on the feast; how they would have celebrated in prose and verse the munificent founders of these public libraries!

Why is it, I often ask myself, that our English

people, which for ages has bred such imaginative genius, which has a literature that nothing in the modern world can rival, are the least reading people of all the nations of Europe north of the Alps and west of the Carpathians? Why are we so far behind our American kinsmen? Why, in the matter of free libraries and books, do we come behind Germans, Scandinavians, Hollanders and Belgians, French, and certainly Americans? Why cannot we make better use even of the munificent gifts of patriotic citizens? I know not; but it is so.

I sometimes fancy that the mechanical and bureaucratic methods of our official education, with our primary schools, and standards, and tests, our endless examinations (which mean endless cramming), and all our engine-turned, compound-action machinery for forcing facts into young brains, as if we were forcing carbonic-acid gas into spring water, may make useful clerks and accountants, but are benumbing to the sense of literature, fatal to art, fatal to poetry. It teaches millions, it is true, the art of correct correspondence, quick arithmetic, and some popular statistics of a remunerative sort. But it deadens originality of mind, vulgarises form, dulls the desire for literature, and would cramp genius, if it ever could seize the chance.

Strive to lift this reproach from our English name, that we are indifferent even to our own immortal literature. Let us make more use of the libraries we have; think less about colleges, and examinations, and degrees; dispute less about education. Let us think more of educating ourselves, as Lamb did, as Keats did; let us use the books we have—and take care always to use the best books.

CHAPTER X

THE NEW MEMOIRS OF GIBBON[1]

THE publication of the *Autobiography and Letters* of Gibbon the historian in their original form is a literary event of rare interest and the solution of a fascinating mystery in the world of letters. The Earl of Sheffield, the grandson and heir of the historian's executor and friend, after presiding over the Gibbon centenary commemoration of 1894, consented to open the cases in which the manuscripts have been sealed up for a hundred years; they became the property of the British Museum; and are now published verbatim in three handsome and carefully annotated octavos. For the first time the world now has the *seven* autobiographic studies of the historian exactly as he wrote them, instead of the curious mosaic which the first Lord Sheffield gave to the public as Gibbon's *Memoirs.* And it now has his *Familiar Letters* as he wrote them, not mutilated, not bowdlerised, but in his own words and his own spelling. Of the original *Memoirs* exactly one third has not before been published. Of the *Letters* Lord Sheffield published about one hundred and ninety, nearly all of them much shortened and very severely 'edited' for the worse. These volumes

[1] *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon.* Printed from hitherto unpublished MSS., with an introduction by the Earl of Sheffield. Edited by John Murray. John Murray: London, 1896.

give more than six hundred letters in the exact form of the autograph manuscript. The three volumes have admirable annotations, headlines, and indices — the *Memoirs* being edited by Mr. John Murray himself, the *Letters* edited by Professor Prothero. The work is worthy of the occasion—and the occasion is a memorable addition to English classics.

The new publication is certainly a literary revelation; but, like the unlocking of so many mysteries, the unsealing of the Gibbon manuscripts has not altogether solved the mystery of the *Memoirs*, or rather (as so often happens in 'mysteries') it has only presented the puzzle in a new form. All readers of the *Decline and Fall*—that is to say, all men and women of a sound education—have long known, as Milman and Morison told them, *that Gibbon did not write his own Autobiography*, *i.e.* in the form in which we have it. Lord Sheffield very truly told the world in 1795 that the *Memoirs* he published 'had been carefully selected, and put together.' But the world never did know the method of the 'selection,' or the astounding freedom with which they had been 'put together.' We did not know that quite a third of the whole had been omitted, together with some of the most brilliant pictures and many of the most piquant remarks that Gibbon ever indited.

We never suspected that the editor had cut about the manuscript of the 'luminous historian' as if it were a schoolboy's theme; that sentences, descriptions, and distinct essays had been clipped from one draft and soldered into another in the middle of a paragraph; that delicious bits of satire had been expunged, so as not to awaken prejudice or to dim the solemnity of 'history'; that much of the fun, nearly all the scandal,

and most of the inner personal life had been eliminated from the *Letters*. We now see that Gibbon's literary carcase was treated in some such way as a hog is converted into ham. But the mystery remains. If Gibbon did not compose his own autobiography, who did? Lord Sheffield, who wrote some fair, average treatises, could hardly be credited with the wonderful literary art by which these stately blocks of Roman masonry were built up into a graceful and symmetrical edifice. No one can read these seven sketches of the historian without admiring the unknown literary hand which so wonderfully wove them together and reset them into one harmonious piece.

That hand, I cannot doubt, was mainly the fair hand of a young girl. I have seen an original letter of Lady Maria Holroyd, Lord Sheffield's eldest daughter, in which she says that she and her stepmother, the second wife of Lord Sheffield, 'are working busily at the Memoirs, and are excellent devils.' There are passages, she says, 'which it would be very unfit to publish'—'If the letters had fallen into the hands of a Boswell, what fun the world would have had.' I have examined the original manuscripts in the British Museum: they are marked for elision, alteration, and abbreviation in the handwriting of Lady Maria. This able and brilliant woman became on marriage the first Lady Stanley of Alderley, whose numerous descendants are so well known in English society and politics. Maria Holroyd's letters before her marriage have recently been published, and they bear out Gibbon's emphatic tribute to her audacity and genius. I have myself little doubt that the skill with which Gibbon's brilliant marble fragments were composed into a coherent picture, like the Mosaics which astonish and delight us at Rome,

was mainly the work of this bold and remarkable woman.

A second mystery remains, now that we have the authentic and complete collection of the historian's *Letters*. They have not been treated quite so freely as the *Memoirs*, although hardly more than a quarter of them have been previously published, and very few of these without omissions. But now that we have the intimate records of his daily life from youth to death in their original form, one wonders anew how so gigantic a work as the *Decline and Fall* was ever completed in about sixteen years, amidst all the distractions of country squires, London gaieties, parliamentary and official duties, interminable worries about his family and property, social scandals and importunate friends. In all these six hundred letters there is not very much about his studies and his writings, but a great deal about politics, society, and pecuniary cares. We are left to imagine for ourselves when the great scholar read, how he wrote, and why he never seemed to exchange a thought with any student of his own calibre of learning. One would think he was a man of fashion, a dilettante man of the world, a wit, a *bon vivant*, and a collector of high-life gossip. All this makes the zest of his *Letters*, which at times seem to recall to us the charm of a Boswell or a Horace Walpole. The world can now have all the fun, as Maria Holroyd said. But it leaves us with the puzzle even darker than before—how did Gibbon, whose whole epoch of really systematic study hardly lasted twenty-five years, acquire so stupendous a body of exact and curious learning?

Now that we have the whole of the *seven* drafts of the *Autobiography* verbatim, it is not very easy to

decide what the historian meant to do with them, or why he amused himself with so many variations on the same air. The six principal ones, which were written between 1788 and 1793, partly cover the same ground, and not seldom tell the same story in a different form and even in a different tone. As literary exercitations by one of the most consummate masters who ever used the English tongue, they are full of curious interest; and every student of style will watch with delight the varying keys and new developments of the dominant theme. It is as if we were listening to a great master of music playing to us himself variations on his own compositions, and exhibiting his art in transposing them to new modes and adapting them to various 'motifs.' Or again, these sketches remind us of the studies by which a great painter tries various groups and figures, before setting them together in a final composition.

Of the 419 pages of the present volume of *Autobiographies*, I count about 160 pages as not hitherto published. No one of the six main sketches was printed entire by Lord Sheffield. The prudence or the delicacy of the ladies excised many characteristic family secrets, nearly all the gems of a somewhat licentious wit, the mordant satires on his grandfather and on William Law, and the beautiful picture of the loves and marriage of his own father and mother. 'Memoir F,' the latest, the longest, the most complete of the drafts, fills just one quarter of the new volume. In this draft the ladies expunged no less than 37 passages, several of them containing many continuous pages. Altogether they excised about 25 pages out of 103; so that the final autobiography of the great historian, as prepared by him the year before his death,

was presented to the world in a form bowdlerised to suit the fastidiousness of a young lady of quality, who herself lived in the society of many of those mentioned in the memoir.

One can imagine the girl saying to her stepmother (just ennobled by the favour of George III.)—'Oh! mamma, we must not let Mr. Gibbon tell the public that his grandfather was a rank Jacobite!'—'Surely, it would be hardly delicate to recount that Mrs. Gibbon married against the wish of her papa!'—'It makes me quite hot even to put my pencil through the very vulgar remark "that she was pregnant at the time of his decease!"'—'And then, we cannot let Mr. Gibbon poke fun at a clergyman and say bad things about a very "good book"; and it is positively wicked to say that the reverend gentleman "died in the arms of his beloved Miranda"!'—'Pray, mamma, what is the meaning of his "floating nine months in a liquid element," and how can we "reckon our life from the age of puberty"?—I am sure all this nasty stuff must go out!' And so the dear ladies ran on with a blue pencil in hand, treating the great historian like a dunce in the fifth form. The world has 'got its fun' at last; but it is laughing rather at the cool audacity of the prudish Maria Holroyd.

There are some delicious touches of Gibbonian humour which were expunged for reasons very difficult to discern. But Maria had decided that as her father's friend must make no reflection on Church or State, so he must never descend from his lofty stage. Here are some playful turns which were committed to the silence of the Sheffield Park strong-room: 'The Dynasties of Assyria and Egypt were my top and cricket-ball'—'a school is the cavern of fear and sorrow'—'the cloak

of reason sits awkwardly on our fashionable divines'—'falsehood is not incompatible with the sacerdotal character'—'the "right Divine of kings to govern wrong" is now exploded, even at Oxford'—'there was a time when I swallowed more physic than food'—'Few works of merit and importance have been executed in a garret or a palace.'—Alas! the courtly Gibbon was not very fond of Dr. Johnson.

It is not merely playful epigrams in the unblushing style of the eighteenth century, but very fine character portraits which we now read for the first time. One of such is the fine sketch of Edward Gibbon the grandfather (1666-1736)—

'His portraits represent a stern and sensible countenance; his children trembled in his presence; tradition informs me that the independent visitors who might have smiled at his anger were awed by his frown; and as he was the richest, or wisest, or oldest of his neighbours, he soon became the oracle and tyrant of a petty kingdom. His own wrongs had not reconciled him to the house of Hanover; his wishes might be expressed in some harmless toasts; but he was disqualified from all public trust; and in the daily devotions of the family, the name of the King for whom they prayed was prudently omitted.'

Why the ladies expunged the delicious bit about the loves of his father and mother—how his 'father's constancy was neither chilled by absence nor dissolved by pleasure'—'such is the beginning of a love tale at Babylon or at Putney'—'the usual consequences ensued: harsh threats and tender protestations, frowns and sighs; the seclusion of the Lady, the despair of the Lover, clandestine correspondence and stolen interviews'—and Aunt Catherine's 'innocent artifices

to second or screen her beloved sister'—Oh! fi! fi! we hear Lady Maria cry out with downcast eyes!

It is plain enough—but far more sad—for what reason the respectable gentlewomen at Sheffield Park expunged the cruel pictures of Aunt Hester and the Rev. William Law. 'Hester persevered in a life of celibacy'—'the pious virgin abandoned for ever the house of a brother from whom she was alienated by the interest of this world and of the next.' 'Of the pains and pleasures of a spiritual life *I* am ill-qualified to speak,' writes the most veracious of historians (and indeed he never wrote a truer word); 'yet her lot, even on earth, has not been unhappy'—'surrounded by dependants, poor and abject as they were, who implored her bounty and imbibed her lessons.'

Of course the fierce satire on the famous William Law—the author of *The Serious Call*—has to go, '—Hell-fire and eternal damnation are darted from every page of the book; and it is, indeed, somewhat whimsical that the Fanatics who most vehemently inculcate the love of God should be those who despoil him of every amiable attribute.' Mr. Law was 'a Nonjuror, a Wit, and a Saint,' whose controversial tracts are buried with his antagonists, though his invective against the stage is quoted for the extravagance of its zeal. He was the tutor of Gibbon's father, whom he satirised under the name of *Flatus*—'the prophetic eye of the tutor must have discerned the butterfly in the caterpillar.'—'In his last days his Religion degenerated into the visions of Jacob Behmen; but he always esteemed himself a true son of the Church of England, though he was separated from her visible communion by the unfortunate quality of a Nonjuror.' —'While my poor Aunt Flavia resigned herself to the

World and the Devil, her sister, Mrs. Hester Gibbon, walked in the way of salvation under the guidance of Mr. Law.' In the published version all this was softened by the refined hands of the ladies into simpler and far less brilliant colours.

Besides all physiological remarks, which have a new interest now that the *Letters* exhibit the historian as a zealous student at the lectures on anatomy of the great John Hunter, some admirable reflections were expunged from 'Memoir F,' the last and most important draft. Two pages on the art of Reading and Writing, and on Arithmetic, are well worth study; and he justly points out the superior intellectual quality of good Reading. It was not true of Gibbon himself that 'the sense and style of the Philosopher or poet are most awkwardly scrawled.' Gibbon's own *Memoirs* are written in a very fine and clear hand. He undervalues his own calligraphy when he calls it 'legible rather than fair.' It is amusing to note in his manuscript that the 'Philosopher' gets a capital letter, the poor '*p*oet' does not. The infant 'Philosopher,' at the age of eight, was sent away from home to a boarding-school: his mother died when he was ten. Forty-six years afterward he writes: 'As I had seldom enjoyed the smiles of maternal tenderness, she was rather the object of my respect than of my love: [poor Mrs. Gibbon had six children after the historian, and died with the last!] some natural tears were soon wiped.' This bit of unsentimental candour was naturally condemned by the tenderness of the Sheffield ladies. But how could they expect to convert Edward Gibbon into a Cowper or a Goldsmith?

Gibbon's reflections on his own childish reminiscences, in the light of his interest in scientific biology,

have a real philosophic interest. He thinks he remembers, at the age of three, shouting out the names of his father's opponents at an election in revenge for a whipping he got; but perhaps 'he may only repeat the hearsay of a riper season.' It is now clear from the newly published *Letters* that the weakness and extravagances of the elder Gibbon imposed on the younger a lifelong burden of anxiety and embarrassment; and we may now more justly estimate the extreme tenderness with which the son alluded to the failings of the parent—failings which the Sheffields sought to cover by the simple process of suppression. There is a clear-cut picture of the Rev. Philip Francis, father of 'Junius,' and translator of Horace; but all this Lord Sheffield dropped—perhaps in dread of another Philippic from the son. Why should he also have dropped the bitter invective against the sufferings of a delicate schoolboy—a piece to be set beside Cowper's *Tirocinium*—'they labour like the soldiers of Persia under the scourge, and their education is nearly finished before they can apprehend the sense or utility of the harsh lessons which they are forced to repeat?' Gibbon's views on schools and colleges are full of interest and suggestion; but we ought from the first to have had his words in their completeness.

His judgment on Universities has been more curtailed than that which he passes on Schools. It is amusing to note that we now have the names of the authorities of Gibbon's own College, Magdalen, which the delicacy of Lord Sheffield suppressed—as he did the prophetic sentence that 'the inveterate evils which are derived from their birth and character must still cleave to our Ecclesiastical corporations.' Gibbon's experience in 1752 of the fellows of Magdalen College

was that 'their conversation stagnated in a round of College business, Tory politics, personal stories, and private scandals.' But so slow is the advance of the College 'in the progressive movement of the age,' or so persistent is its spirit of ill-humour, that it has declined to accept from the Gibbon Commemoration Committee a tablet to the memory of one of the greatest scholars who ever entered its mediæval cloister.

The thirty pages of 'Memoir B' were almost inevitably expunged by the Sheffields, inasmuch as they tell the story of Gibbon's life again, down to his leaving Oxford, much as it is told in 'Memoirs F' and 'C.' But the comparison of the three versions is full of interest, especially in the story of Gibbon's conversion to the Church of Rome. It would be a study in style to compare the famous passage, in its latest form, with the same sentence in its first shape (pp. 83, 127, and 227): 'It might at least be expected that an Ecclesiastical school should inculcate the orthodox principles of Religion. But our venerable Mother had contrived to unite the opposite extremes of bigotry and indifference: a heretic or unbeliever was a monster in her eyes; but she was always, or often, or sometimes remiss in the spiritual education of her own children.'

In 'Memoir B' we may now read, without .expurgation, some amusing touches about Gibbon's first visit to Lausanne, about the Pavillards, Voltaire and 'his fat and ugly niece,' about the Curchods, and the ungarbled story of his love for Susanne Curchod, afterward Mme. Necker. The famous epigram—'I sighed as a lover, I obeyed as a son,' was cut out of another Memoir in a rather different connection. But no one can now read the *Letters* without admitting that

Gibbon's whole conduct in relation to Susanne Curchod was honourable, however unheroic; and that they both continued until death to cherish the intimacy of an unclouded friendship. It appears from a letter of Lady Maria's that, just before her own death, Mme. Necker was shown the passage in 'Memoir B,' which truly and tenderly related the story of their early love.

It was a needless scruple, again, that expunged a very curious and interesting page (p. 173) on the Gods of Polytheism—whether they were conceived as allegorical beings, and if so, how did they become parents by mortal lovers. The twelve pages of disquisition on the Militia of England might have seemed tedious in 1795, but we may read it now with interest in 1897. Recent investigations have proved that the corps in which Gibbon served for many years, whilst permanently embodied, was as fine a regiment of soldiers as England could show at that epoch, and that the puny and portly scholar was himself a first-rate officer who thoroughly understood, and even relished, his duties in the field.

Of 'Memoir C,' with about eighty pages, only one-fourth was printed by Lord Sheffield; and indeed it tells much the same story as 'Memoir B,' in almost the same words, but with many variations. In the strangest way, but with wonderful skill, Lord Sheffield picked out pages, sentences, even phrases here and there, and inserted them in the published piece. Unfortunately, he cut out some of the most piquant epigrams, some of the drollest sallies of pompous wit, that Gibbon ever elaborated in his half-conscious and half-comic grandiloquence. When he goes to visit, at Porchester Castle, five thousand naked and starved French

prisoners—'their distress exhibited the calamities of War: and their joyous noise the vivacity of the nation.' Of course, when the historian of Rome arrives at Milan and breaks forth with the truly Philistine sneer that 'the Dome or Cathedral is an unfinished monument of Gothic superstition and wealth,' the fine taste of Lady Maria does not suffer so gross a platitude to appear. And so, too, the blue pencil goes through the second half of his epigram—that the spectacle of Venice afforded some hours of astonishment 'and some days of disgust.' The delicate ladies could not permit a young man to tell the world, 'I tore myself from the embraces of Paris.' They make him say, more politely and more tamely, 'I reluctantly left Paris.' Nor could they permit him to say that his associates at Boodle's Club 'were not of the first eminence in the literary or political world.' Still less could they suffer him to publish the unblushing avowal: 'A matrimonial alliance has ever been the object of my terror rather than my wishes. I was not very strongly pressed by my family or my passions to propagate the name and race of the Gibbons, and if some reasonable temptations occurred in the neighbourhood, the vague idea never proceeded to the length of a serious negotiation.' But why on earth could they not let the great scholar say, 'By the habit of early rising I always secured a sacred portion of the day; and many precious moments were stolen and saved by my rational avarice'? Doubtless, they said that Mr. Gibbon was not avaricious, and that avarice was never rational.

'Memoir E,' with about sixty pages, is very important, as it is the sole authority of the published text from his father's death in 1770 down to 1789. It is one of the earliest drafts, and is dated 'Lausanne,

March 2, 1791.' The first thirteen pages, which recount Gibbon's life down to his thirty-fourth year, were naturally suppressed, for they simply go over the ground trodden by other drafts. The notes, which are now printed verbatim, were in most cases the basis of remarks subsequently embodied in the text. But from his establishment in London in 1773, 'Memoir E' was published entire, with the exception of a few passages which were regarded as indiscreet or unpleasant. It was thought hardly consistent with truth for the obese and gouty old man to say, 'the play of the animal machine still continues to be easy and regular.' It was but too obvious to his friends that it was very uncertain and creaking. Reference to his attacks of gout, to tradesmen's bills, and his private affairs were eliminated. And the last twenty lines of the entire *Autobiography* as Gibbon wrote it, were cut out of the text and, in Lord Sheffield's version, were thrown into a long note.

Now here comes in a fascinating literary problem. Both the exordium and the peroration of Gibbon's *Autobiography*, as published by Lord Sheffield and as hitherto known, although they are Gibbon's actual words, are in no real sense Gibbon's own composition. They have been rearranged, transposed, pieced together out of several drafts by the editor, or altered so as to vary the literary effect. Both exordium and peroration are amongst the happiest passages in the famous *Autobiography*, and indeed are as eloquent and impressive as any similar passages in our literature. Competent judges will agree that both exordium and peroration have gained greatly by the skill and audacity of the editor, and are distinctly superior in brilliancy and weight to Gibbon's own draft, as after seven trials

he left it in his own hand. A very silly epigram on the issue of Pope's *Iliad* declared that—

> 'After ages shall with wonder seek,
> Who 'twas translated Homer into Greek!'

The wonder of our own age is—Who was it that so greatly improved the stately eloquence of Edward Gibbon?

The *Autobiography*, as printed by Lord Sheffield and as known to us, opens with a paragraph taken from 'Memoir A,' the earliest of all, of which Lord Sheffield printed only a few sentences. Even of this paragraph he printed only fourteen lines and dropped the rest. He then cuts as many lines out of the *Seventh* Sketch, but much transposes it and curtails it. Next, he clips a bit from 'Memoir A' with the same treatment, adding the splendid and famous piece about Fielding and the Imperial House of Hapsburg—a real *purpureus pannus*—which he clipped from Sketch Seven. Then with snippets from 'A' again, he gives us a page from 'B'; and then he proceeds with 'Memoir F'—'my family is originally derived from the county of Kent'—omitting, transposing, softening, and refitting the whole as he goes along. And so, when he comes to the peroration, he elevates a passage from the notes into the text, and degrades Gibbon's own *finale* of twenty lines from the text into a note. And yet most readers will feel that both the opening and the close of the *Autobiography* have greatly gained by the process of this amazing revision, and that the author of the *Decline and Fall* did not compose his periods with all the grace and point displayed by the unknown author of this *rifacimento*.

Of 'Memoir A,' the earliest of all (1788-89), with

nearly forty pages, Lord Sheffield printed barely one. It is occupied mainly with family history and heraldic lore. It was perhaps rightly judged to be hardly important enough to print at the time, but it will be read with interest by many genealogists. It is a warning to all learned persons not to meddle with learning outside their own field—*ne sutor ultra crepidam*—when we find the historian of the civilised world over a period of a thousand years making an odd blunder in an elementary point of Heraldry. He makes much fun about his ancestor Edmond Gibbon having changed the three scallop-shells in the family coat into three Ogresses, or 'female monsters,' in revenge upon three of his kinswomen with whom he had a law-suit. Now, '*Ogress*' in Heraldry (said to be a corruption of Old French *ogoesse*) is simply the same as *pellet*, and pellet is simply a *roundle sable.* The variation of a *pellet* for a *scallop-shell* is obvious enough; and the historian's ponderous humour about the savage women and his ancestor's 'whimsical revenge' is pure nonsense: the melancholy blundering of a philosopher when he launches out into a study of which he had not mastered the ordinary terms.

Of 'Memoir D,' with twenty-five pages, Lord Sheffield did not print a line, and it contains little that was not said elsewhere. Although it is interesting to us for purposes of collation and as a study of style, it was in no way essential for Lord Sheffield's object. The short Fragment, number Seven, contained little but the stately passages we know so well about the family of Confucius, of the Spencers, and the Fieldings. Gibbon's own Testament and a good Index complete the volume, in which the present Earl of Sheffield assures us in his Introduction—'*every piece contained*

in this volume as the work of Edward Gibbon is now printed exactly as he wrote it, without suppression or emendation.'

The casual reader, it may be, will be a little puzzled at the first glance at the book to distinguish the variety of forms which the narrative assumes in draft after draft. But to the student of English literature, the gradual evolution of a splendid and classical piece cannot fail to be suggestive and fascinating. What a medley of Gibbonian antitheses and 'philosophic' humour is now unveiled without 'the obscurity of a learned language'!—'The frequent imposition of oaths had enlarged and fortified the Jacobite conscience'—'had not *our* alliance preceded *her* marriage, I should be less confident of my descent from the Whetnalls of Peckham'—'In the life of every man of letters . . . the most important part of his education is that which he bestows on himself'—'it was with much reluctance and ill-humour that the envious bard [Voltaire] allowed the representation of the *Iphigénie* of Racine'—'had I been more indigent or more wealthy, I should not have possessed the leisure or the perseverance to prepare and execute my voluminous history'—'Wretched is the author, and wretched will be the work, where daily diligence is stimulated by daily hunger.'

Another chapter deals with the *Letters*, now published complete in two handsome volumes, three-fourths of them being quite new, and most of them for the first time to be read in their complete form. They cannot fail to raise our estimate of the writer. We knew how genial, how good-natured, how sensible he was. But we had no adequate means of gauging his thoroughly affectionate nature, his sense of his family

duties, and his placid temper under unmerited troubles. He shows himself throughout a good son to a spendthrift father, who almost ruined his son's whole life, and to a somewhat exacting stepmother of a most uncongenial nature. His really passionate affection for his friends is a striking and beautiful quality, when we consider the worldly society and the unromantic age in which his life was cast. Recluses like Cowper, poets like Shelley, have filled the history of literature with some famous examples of soul-sympathy. But alas! the hates and quarrels of authors fill many more pages than their friendships and their intimacies, unless they be of a scandalous sort. But the unique charm of Gibbon's letters lies in their picture of domestic tenderness, in their freedom from any shadow of enmity toward any one, and even from a trace of literary disputes. The really beautiful intimacy between the historian and the Sheffield family is a bright spot in the annals of literature. He managed to combine the life of a Horace Walpole and a Samuel Johnson without the cynicism of the one or the fierceness of the other. All students of the latter half of the eighteenth century will find much to interest them in Gibbon's familiar touches on the social and political life of the time. And American readers in particular will eagerly follow all he has to narrate about the War of Independence. Gibbon is no profound statesman, nor a consummate painter of manners: he is neither the wit nor the 'philosopher' he imagines himself to be. But in his familiar outpourings to his bosom friends, he never fails to show us in an age most artificial, unheroic, and coarse, the Ciceronian ideal of the *mitis sapientia Læli.*

CHAPTER XI

NEW LETTERS OF GIBBON[1]

THE two volumes of Gibbon's *Letters* now first published with his *Memoirs* are most pleasant reading; they throw new light on the character of the historian and his age; and they are thoroughly well edited and annotated. The so-called 'Letters' that the first Lord Sheffield gave to the world just a hundred years ago were merely scraps, cuttings, and occasional specimens culled from the great mass which the third Earl now gives to the curious public. Most of the personal history, all the scandal, and many of the piquant epigrams were withheld by the prudence of the noble executor and the prudery of his daughter. Those who wish to look into the inner life of one of the greatest of English men of letters, and into British society at home and abroad in the first half of the reign of George III., may now study both in the exact transcript of Gibbon's *Familiar Letters*.

The 'fierce light that beats upon' a great name now reveals to us the historian as one of the most genial, affectionate, sane, and contented natures in literary history—with a genius for friendship, indulgent almost to a fault toward all failings, gently fond of all pleasant things and people, and willing to put up with much for

[1] *Private Letters of Edward Gibbon* (1753-1794). Edited by Rowland E. Prothero. 2 vols. John Murray, 1896.

the sake of an easy life. Never was any man less heroic, who less pretended to the heroic, with more perfectly worldly ideals, and a more instinctive repugnance to any enthusiasm. A cosmopolitan *philosophe* of the eighteenth century to the bone, with all the optimism, the cool brain, the *apolausticism*, the insensibility to the moral and spiritual reformation to come, which mark the literary aristocrat of the time. We are not likely now to over-rate the good sense and good nature of such men. We see all their blindness, their grossness, their egoism. But their culture and their balance of mind still interest us. The life they led fascinates us in a way, as does the life of Horace and of Pliny. Peace to their ashes! Let us utter a half-pagan sigh over the classical urn, sacred to the *Dîs Mânibus* of the historian of Rome.

His friend judiciously expunged from the published remains nearly all that records the troubles and embarrassments which weighed on him through life. We now see well enough why the historian gave up Parliament, public life, London society, and at last his native country. His father kept Gibbon until middle life strictly his dependant under his own will and rule; and at his own death left his only child, then aged thirty-three, a man practically ruined, with several estates hopelessly encumbered. The son, then a grown man of reputation and ambition, struggled manfully for some years to maintain his stepmother, to clear the wreck of their fortunes, and to keep the position into which he had been bred. At last, without repining, he quietly withdrew to the foreign land where so large a part of his life was passed, and devoted himself entirely to his gigantic task. The father, an insatiable man of pleasure, was one of those popular men of the world

whose charm and *bonhomie* disguise the real selfishness and cruelty of their domestic lives.

At the age of nine the poor child who became Edward Gibbon was sent from his father's home, which he saw very little again until the age of twenty-one. From sixteen to twenty-one he was kept at Lausanne, in spite of his entreaties that he might leave it, and he was forced to give up the admirable woman to whom he had engaged himself. At twenty-one he was brought home and called on to cut off the entail of his settled estate and to join in raising a heavy mortgage. A year later he was dragged into the militia by his father, and served as a soldier in camp for two years and a half. His foreign journey, from which such great things resulted, was cut short by the extravagance and commands of the father. And when, after a few more troubled years, the father died, the young student found himself involved in difficult family embarrassments, which were not finally disentangled at his death at fifty-six. It is plain from this entire correspondence, and especially from the dignified remonstrance to his stepmother in 1771 (Letter 113), that the son was in no way to blame, but had acted, as he proudly says, with filial duty and personal economy. His good sense enabled him to see all the weaknesses and follies of his father; but he uniformly speaks of these with affectionate reserve. Nor is there in this mass of letters any trace of ignoble complaint.

Another remarkable feature of these letters is the complete absence of those controversies, jealousies, and heartburnings which so often distress the lives of literary men. Gibbon never seems to have had an enemy—except the gout; and he never grumbles at any one but the lawyers and the money-dealers, and

that in a tone which is half burlesque. The cruel sarcasms of the history melt in his letters into playful banter; as a correspondent at least, if not as an author, he is perfectly clean, good-natured, and natural. There is an amazing silence as to all that is spiritual and profound—but nothing cynical, nothing profane. He is shrewd, sensible, self-possessed to a fault, but he never has to resort 'to the obscurity of a learned language' to cover his indecorum. He has nothing of the devil and rattle of Byron, nor the inimitable babble of Horace Walpole. He has not the pathetic charm of Cowper, nor the burly passion of Johnson. But the imperturbable good sense, and the vast erudition and experience of this typical cosmopolitan *virtuoso*, throw a vivid light—it may be a somewhat lurid and melancholy light—upon the highest stratum of culture on the eve of the great Revolution.

His first letter, at sixteen, is all that the good boy ought to say to his papa who had banished him abroad. His books were seized at Calais, in order to be examined by the censor (this was in 1753). In a month he understood French, and in a year or so he had almost forgotten how to write English. He talks of his '*evasion*,' 'what *party* can he take?' a 'plain *recite*,' and he hears of a thing 'by the *canal* of a certain Mr. Hugonin.' At nineteen he cannot exist at Lausanne without his d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale*. Though he had never seen his new stepmother, he writes to his father in French—'assurez ma chère mère (c'est avec bien du plaisir que je lui donne ce titre) de tous les sentimens que ce nom sacré emporte avec lui.' Arrived in England, he is commissioned to buy tickets in the public lottery. They all come up blanks. And the young philosopher of twenty-one thus consoles his

father, who was evidently a hardened gambler: 'All our visionary plans of grandeur are disappointed, the dream of those who had the ten thousand pounds will last a little, but perhaps not much, longer.' Meeting the son—'a little odd cur' of a Doctor Maty, whom Johnson called 'a little black dog,' a man whom Gibbon despised—he tells his father that he 'tipped the boy with a crown, and the father with a coal of fire.'

At twenty-one, the young gentleman begins to be a man about town in the best society of London. He is introduced to the famous Lady Harvey's Assembly, 'where ('tis true, though wonderful) there is no card-playing, but very good company and very good conversation.' There he is to meet 'the great David Hume.' Here is a portentously solid apophthegm for a youth of fashion: 'My unfashionable politics are that a war can hardly be a good one, and a peace hardly a bad one.' What a curious folly was the mania for saving the postage of letters by the begging of franks. 'I have got four dozen of Franks for you from Sir G. Napier, which I shall send you by the waggon.' It had come to be a sign of gentility never to pay for a letter, but to worry your acquaintances in Parliament in order to evade the tax, which fell upon the common people. At twenty-six he goes again to Paris, with which he is delighted, and much prefers to London society. 'Much less play, more conversation, and instead of our immense routs, agreable [*sic*] societies where you know and are known by almost everybody you meet.' He is struck with the French respect for the English character. 'The name of Englishman inspires as great an idea at Paris as that of Roman could at Carthage, after the defeat of Hannibal. . . .' —'We are now looked on as a nation of philosophers and patriots.'

At the age of twenty-six, we seem to catch the first germ of his lifelong work. He writes from Lausanne in May 1763 (thirteen years before the appearance of his first volume), 'I am busy upon the ancient Geography of Italy *and the reviewing my Roman history and antiquities.*' A little later he is engaged upon 'a considerable work'—'a description of the ancient Geography of Italy taken from the original authors.' He sees Voltaire, at seventy, 'act a Tartar Conqueror with a hollow, broken voice, and making love to a very ugly niece of about fifty.' But he is amazed at the veteran's energy. 'Show me, in history or fable, a famous poet of Seventy who has acted in his own plays, and has closed the scene with a supper and ball for a hundred people.' A year passes, and he still has his great task in view—'I have never lost sight of the undertaking I laid the foundations of at Lausanne, and I do not despair of being able *one day to produce something, by way of a description of ancient Italy, which may be of some use to the publick*, and of some credit to myself.' (Letter 37. June 1764.)

But if the historian of ancient Rome was already a great scholar, he had a curiously wrong judgment as to mediæval things. 'Of all the towns in Italy, I am the least satisfied with Venice; objects which are only singular without being pleasing produce a momentary surprize which soon gives way to satiety and disgust. Old and in general ill-built houses, ruined pictures, and stinking ditches dignified with the pompous denomination of canals, a fine bridge spoilt by two Rows of houses upon it, and a large square decorated with the worst Architecture I ever yet saw.' And this is Venice! Shades of Byron, Rogers, Shelley, and George Sand! It needed a hundred years before Ruskin could

proclaim the glory of these 'ill-built houses,' 'ruined pictures,' and the 'worst Architecture' ever seen. Well! they didn't know everything down in the eighteenth century. We learn that the 'grand tour' of a young gentleman who frequented courts, embassies, and the best society abroad, cost him about £700 per annum in the middle of the last century; and the young Gibbon, who was careful and did not gamble, but travelled rather *en seigneur* with a valet, plumes himself on spending only £150 in ten weeks.

Gibbon's remarks on public affairs, though never profound or serious, are worthy of note. The Royal Marriage Act (12 George III. c. 11)—'this most odious law will be forced on Parliament. I do not remember ever to have seen so general a concurrence of all ranks, parties, and professions of men. Administration themselves are the reluctant executioners, but the King will be obeyed, and the bill is universally considered as his, reduced into legal or rather illegal form by Lord Mansfield and the Chancellor.' In 1772, before the American Independence, George III. was really a king, not unlike his descendant Wilhelm of Prussia to-day. All Gibbon tells us of the partition of Poland in 1772 is, that he will 'back Austria against the aged Horse'—(*i.e.* Frederick the Great). Ah! short-sighted historian of Rome, how little did you understand the greatest of your contemporaries!

As is well known, Gibbon was steadily against the independence of the United States, until his good sense convinced him of the folly of continuing the struggle. At first he is sure 'that with firmness, all may go well.' 'Returned this moment from an American debate. A Remonstrance and Representation from the Assembly of New York, presented and feebly intro-

duced by Burke, but most forcibly supported by Fox. . . . The House tired and languid. In this season and on America, the Archangel Gabriel would not be heard. On Thursday, an attempt to repeal the Quebec Bill [for the free exercise of the Roman Catholic religion], and then to the right about, and for myself, having supported the British, I must destroy the Roman Empire.' To Edward Gibbon what were George Washington or George III. compared with Belisarius and Justinian? In May 1775—'this looks serious, and is indeed so . . . unless the *Insurgents* are determined to hasten a famine, they must have returned to their own habitations!' Oh! profound historian, these 'insurgents' were not Sicilians or Syrians, but Anglo-Saxons of the old blood! June 1775—'I have not courage to write about America. We talk familiarly of Civil War, Dissolutions of Parliament, Impeachments, and Lord Chatham. The boldest tremble, the most vigorous talk of peace.' 31 October 1775—'The conquest of America is a *great* work: every part of that Continent is either lost or useless.' 'What a wretched piece of work do we seem to be making of it in America!' They have almost lost the appellation of *Rebels*.' How droll this sounds after a hundred and twenty-five years! 'Unless Howe has success, we shall be less unanimous for the design of conquering America!' At last Gibbon gives in (December 16, 1777)—'What will be the resolution of our Governors I know not, but I shall scarcely give my consent to exhaust still further the finest country in the World in the prosecution of a war from whence *no reasonable man entertains any hopes of success*. It is better to be humbled than ruined.' Sensible—but not heroic. The historian who could so well describe a hero, had

little of the hero in himself—'Half my acquaintance,' he says, 'are running down to Bath for the holydays.' Nero fiddled whilst Rome was burning: Gibbon concocted epigrams and friendly letters whilst a British army of 10,000 men was surrendering to *rebels*! It was all over by February 1778. 'Lord N[orth] does not deserve pardon for the past, applause for the present, or confidence for the future.' To his friend Holroyd he writes: 'You will see that America is not *yet* conquered . . . there seems to be a universal desire of peace even on the most humble conditions. Are you still fierce?' And Gibbon voted with Fox against the Government on his motion to refuse more troops to go to America in February 1778. Fox, Burke, and Chatham honestly condemned Lord North and the American war on just and patriotic grounds. Gibbon supported and approved of the war, till he lost heart, and thought he had better get on with the sack of Rome by the barbarians. Never was able man less of a hero, less of a patriot, less of a statesman.

As to the French Revolution, Gibbon, as we always knew, was uniformly hostile and wrong-headed. 'Burke's book is a most admirable medicine against the French disease.' 'The strange Revolution which has humbled all that was high, and exalted all that was low, in France.' 'Burke is a most eloquent and rational madman.' Lord Sheffield says, 'every one asks—is Fox mad?' We now learn that the king fell into Homeric laughter over a pleasantry of Gibbon's that the French Revolution reminded him of a childish caricature in which a hog was shown roasting a cook! But Lord Sheffield, who, with his daughter, outdid Gibbon in violent abuse of the 'Gallic wolves on the prowl,' the 'Gallic dogs,' and the 'French disease

infecting other countries,' himself published most of the historian's tirades against a movement which he wholly misconceived; and thus we have little new to learn on this head from Gibbon's own letters, though much that is significant from the unpublished letters of Lord Sheffield himself and of his brilliant daughter, Maria Holroyd. They show how the great movement in France, even before the Terror and the Guillotine, had roused the British aristocracy to real passion.

In small things and in great the familiar notes of the historian are curious reading, now strangely blind, now remarkably sagacious and detached. 'Blessings on the man (his name is now buried in oblivion) who first invented the loud trumpet of Advertisements.' The trumpet is now of stunning volume, and too often brays us deaf; and opinions to-day are divided whether they are a blessing or a nuisance. We are taken into the library in Bentinck Street where the early part of the great history was composed—'the paper of the Room will be a fine shag flock paper, light blue with a gold border, the Book-cases painted white, ornamented with a light frize [*sic*]; neither Doric nor Dentulated (that was yours) Adamic.' It is 'my own new clean comfortable dear house'—'I now live, which I never did before, *and if it would but rain*, should enjoy that unity of study and society, in which I have always placed my prospect of happiness.' 'I have never formed any great schemes of avarice, ambition, or vanity: and all the notions I ever formed of a London life in my own house, and surrounded by my books, with a due mixture of study and society, are fully realised.' An omnivorous reader—an unwearied student—but no recluse—no puritan!

From this lettered ease, Gibbon was torn by the

unexpected offer of a seat in Parliament, and ultimately by the office of a Lord of Trade—'an event which changes the whole colour of my future life.' He was elected M.P. for Liskeard in his absence. He was but thirty-eight, but he thought himself too old to become an orator. 'I have remained silent, and notwithstanding all my efforts chained down to my place by some invisible—unknown invisible power. *Now America and almost Parliament are at an end* [April 1775], I have *resumed my History* with vigour and adjourned Politicks to next Winter.' Gibbon was a scandalously indifferent Senator, and a *fainéant* official; but at least he knew his own weaknesses and impotence as a man of affairs. He came to hate Parliament, which he calls *Pandemonium*. 'I am heartily tired of the place'—'this Parliamentary prattle'—'I again descend into the noise and nonsense of the Pandemonium.' He fears that his friend may regret being 'excluded from that Pandemonium which we have so often cursed so long as you were obliged to attend it.' When retired permanently to Lausanne, he still expects to *sell* his seat, and talks of 'the little but precious stock *which I had so foolishly embarked in the Parliamentary bottom*.' So that a seat in Parliament was a mere investment, which he proposed to sell to the highest bidder! And his Lordship of Trade, or any other minor office which he could fill without trouble, was a mere convenient escape from pecuniary embarrassment. Naturally, such a man 'shuddered at Grey's motion' [for Parliamentary Reform], and thought that 'such men as Grey, Sheridan, Erskine, have talents for mischief.' We cannot wonder at the origin and issue of the struggle with America, when we see that men like Edward Gibbon were the Members and Ministers whom Lord North could select.

And yet Edward Gibbon was a man of learning, sagacity, and honour, not a whit worse than his colleagues, who all clung to the principles of Pitt and Burke.

Amongst the smaller points in the *Letters* may be noted the startling prevalence of disease. People in full health and youth are continually dying of measles, fevers, small-pox, and apoplexy. Small-pox is as common as influenza to-day, and is treated as one of the familiar nuisances of life, so that patients who recover are congratulated on being safe from a second attack—at any rate for many years. As to the gout, it comes and goes like a common catarrh. Gibbon himself is crippled by it every half-year or so ; and he talks of paying up his 'gout-tax' with a solemn and somewhat awkward humour. How he lived at all with such a constitution is a mystery. It is even a greater mystery how he ate so voraciously up to the age of fifty-six. Gibbon did not drink, and he was not a glutton—in days when all Englishmen ate and drank like brutes, when Pitt could not speak without a bottle or two of port, and Sheridan was picked up from the gutter by the watchman, whom he told he was Wilberforce. But it is plain that Gibbon liked a good vintage and an elegant dinner. His plaintive appeals to his friend to send him out to Lausanne some old Madeira—'he trembles for his Madeira'—his despair when he runs short of the generous fluid, are droll enough to us : there was nothing to laugh at in his own day. An English gentleman of that age regarded 'the laying down' of a cellar of old wine as a duty that he owed to his country and his order. Some of the historic Madeira still remains ; and the present Lord Sheffield delights to give a friend a glass

of that most precious ambrosia which sent the blood coursing in the veins of the historian of Elagabalus and Attila.

The great scholar led a pleasant life in London—in August 'a delicious solitude'—'I lead the true life of a Philosopher, which consists in doing what I really like, without any regard to the world or to fashion.' 'A few friends and a great many books may entertain me, but I think fifteen hundred people the worst company in the world.' His friend's cook was taken with religious mania—which they then called 'fanaticism' —'That furious principle which has sometimes overturned Nations has in this instance been contented with unsettling the reason of a Cook.' Religious enthusiasm seems to be almost the only thing which really rouses the philosopher's indignation. He has no high opinion of Trial by Jury—'Out of twelve jurymen, I suppose six to be incapable of understanding the question, three afraid of giving offence, and two more who will not take the trouble of thinking. Remains one who has sense, courage, and application.' His stepmother and his friends proposed marriage to him, and he allowed them to play about the idea. As to one suggested alliance, he feels scruples about the *religion* of the lady. He will not submit to sermons and family prayers—'I would not marry an Empress on those conditions.' He does not believe in marriage. 'Sir Stanier and Lady Porter exhibit a very pretty picture of conjugal fondness and felicity, and yet they have been married very near three weeks.'

The 'grand style' of the *Decline and Fall* was evidently part of Gibbon's nature. His most hasty and familiar confidences are continually dropping into it unconsciously. At times he amuses himself by openly

burlesquing it himself. 'I think that, through the dark and doubtful mist of futurity [this sonorous exordium has nothing to do with the fall of Empires, or the rise of new religions], I can discern some faint probability that the Gibbon and his Aunt will arrive at Sheffield Place, before the Sun, or rather the Earth, has accomplished eight diurnal Revolutions.' To Lady Sheffield he writes: 'Inconstant, pusillanimous Woman! Is it possible that you should so soon have forgot your solemn vows and engagements, and that you should *pretend* to prefer the dirt and darkness of the Weald of Sussex to the splendid and social life of London?'—One thinks he went to bed in ruffles, and rose to a march performed by the band of the Guards. 'The supplies for the journey [a trip to Paris] will be paid by the Roman Empire.' The Roman Empire could well bear the strain even of the pomp of its historian. 'After decking myself out with silks and silver, the ordinary establishment of Coach, Lodgeing [*sic*], Servants, eating, and pocket expences does not exceed sixty pounds pr. month. Yet I have two footmen in handsome liveries behind my Coach, and my apartment is hung with damask.'

Here is his day in Paris. 'I am just now going (nine o'clock) to the King's Library, where I shall stay till twelve. As soon as I am dressed I set out to dine with the Duke de Nivernois, shall go from thence to the French Comedy into the Princess de Beauvau's *loge grillée*, and am not quite determined whether I shall sup at Madame du Deffand's, Madame Necker's, or the Sardinian Embassadress's. Do not be fond of shewing my letter; the playful effusions of friendship would be construed by strangers as gross vanity.' The brilliant society of France danced and supped

on the crater of the volcano. And the courtly historian, whom it welcomed with open arms, could obviously unbend from his philosophic 'solitude' when the humour seized him. He has even more famous society in London—'This moment Beauclerck, Lord Ossory, Sheridan, Garrick, Burke, Charles Fox, and Lord Cambden (no bad set, you will perhaps say) have left me.' Gibbon knew almost all the famous men and women of his age—but with one notable exception. Samuel Johnson disliked Gibbon as an infidel and a prig. Gibbon disliked Johnson as a fanatic and a bear. Both were right as well as wrong. No two men could be more unlike, or less indulgent to each other's failings.

In practical affairs of life Gibbon is eminently sensible, cool, and just. Here is a capital letter to his fiery friend, Lord Sheffield, who apparently wanted to measure swords with a gallant officer: 'I have seen the General. You are both wrong: he first in lending you papers without *special* leave; you in the serious anger you expressed on so trifling a business. Unless you wish that this slight scratch should inflame into an incurable sore, embrace the lucky opportunity of his illness and confinement, which will excuse your dignity and shall assuage your resentment. Call on him this evening, give and receive, between jest and earnest, a volley of *damns*, and then let the whole affair be no more remembered than it deserves. *Dixi et liberavi animam meam.*' His advice to Lord Sheffield as to his parliamentary election is thoroughly wise and practical. He had the *mens sana in corpore insano!* 'Next Wednesday I conclude my forty-fifth year, and in spite of the changes of Kings and Ministers [he might have added of the Royal visitations of King

Gout], I am very glad that I was born.' 'I am now seated in my library before a good fire, and among three or four thousand of my old acquaintance.' Lausanne, to which he retreats, is 'in the most beautiful situation in the world. I shall exchange the most unwholesome air (that of the House of Commons) for the purest and most salubrious, the heat and hurry of party for a cool li*tt*erary repose.' Yet this 'step is dictated by the hard law of œconomy or rather of necessity.' He had been ruined by his father's extravagance; his embarrassments were incessant; he had lost his seat in Parliament, his office, his public career, and at last he had been driven by pecuniary difficulties to abandon the brilliant society he loved. Yet Lausanne seems to him a Paradise. Never was there such an optimist. He can even write kindly 'of the decline and fall of his old Enemy—not the Devil—but the Gout.'

His enormous erudition, his passion for books, his historic imagination—these things were the real Gibbon; his airs of a dandy, of a *bon vivant*, of an *esprit fort*, were merely the accidents into which he was born. Now and then he had toyed with the idea of marriage. He had seen a young lady 'with very tolerable eyes,' good sense, and good humour. But he was himself *indifferent*, and she was *poor*. Another was religious, and he 'abhors a devotee, though a friend to decency and toleration.' He sought and admired many women; but they never could stir him to surrender his liberty. 'The habits of female conversation have sometimes tempted me to acquire the piece of furniture, a wife; and could I unite in a single Woman, the virtues and accomplishments of half a dozen of my acquaintance, I would instantly pay my addresses to the Constella-

tion. In the meantime I must content myself with my other wife, the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, which I prosecute with pleasant and constant industry.'

But though Edward Gibbon was as insensible as ever man was to the love which leads to marriage, he had two fine passions in his nature—the love of his books and the love of his friends. His intimacy with Deyverdun, the Severys, the Neckers, was a type of romantic attachment between persons of different nations; his affection for Reynolds, Garrick, and Fox does him honour. But the brotherly terms on which he lived with the Holroyds rises to the height of one of those historic friendships which will one day adorn a new treatise 'De Amicitia.' One cannot read these intimate outpourings of confidence between Gibbon and the first Lord Sheffield—a correspondence maintained unbroken for thirty years—without being struck with this fine example of friendship between two men so curiously unlike, and yet so perfectly sympathetic. It was the union, Gibbon wrote, of 'the lion and the lamb, the eagle and the worm.' Holroyd is all fire, energy, business capacity, ambition, governing power. Gibbon is placid, indolent, unpractical, and unaspiring. Holroyd does everything for his friend : is his agent, banker, his host, his patron, and his counsellor. Never had helpless student a more vigorous and devoted man of the world to extricate him from all his troubles. Never did an ambitious statesman, with a thousand cares on his shoulders, fling himself more assiduously to rescue and comfort an embarrassed philosopher. One is struck as much with the self-devotion of the peer to his friend as by his many-sided capacity and his indomitable energy. As Gibbon declares in his

grand way, 'Alexander may sleep, if Parmenio is awake.'

Nor is Gibbon's beautiful confidence in his friend, his affection for him, for his wife, and his daughters, less memorable in the record of literary friendships. To him Lady Sheffield is 'my dearest My Lady, whom I have now loved as a sister for something better or worse than twenty years . . .'—'he has a memory, a conscience, a heart, and that heart is sincerely devoted to Lady S.' The fine letters that he wrote to the husband on the death of the wife have been already published. It was on receipt of the sad news of his friend's loss that the historian set out from Lausanne to console him. And the long and difficult journey undoubtedly increased the fatal complaint from which he had long been suffering. For the eldest daughter of the Sheffields, Gibbon had the highest admiration and affection—'that fine diamond,' 'indeed a most extraordinary young woman,' who united 'the strong sense of a man with the easy elegance of a female.' She was indeed an extraordinary woman, and justified the historian's deep interest in her education. And now at last, by the wise decision of this lady's nephew, the present Earl of Sheffield, the world is permitted to know how much the reputation of Gibbon has owed her, and how closely the memory of her own family is entwined with that of the illustrious historian of Rome.

CHAPTER XII

HISTORICAL METHOD OF FROUDE

THE modern school of historical writing may now be said to have superseded the older method which flourished in the last century. Hume and Robertson, Bossuet and Voltaire, aimed mainly at presenting a living picture of a given epoch with artistic completeness of composition and of form. Gibbon carried out this aim to an almost ideal type, basing it (as none of his predecessors had done) on exhaustive study of all accessible materials to be found in print. And Gibbon's laborious imitator, Dean Milman, is perhaps the last great exponent of that method — *sequiturque patrem non passibus æquis.*

The historians of the present century, under the influence originally of Ranke in Germany, of Guizot in France, and Sir Henry Ellis and other editors of the Museum and Rolls records in England, have devoted themselves rather to original research than to eloquent narrative, to the study of special institutions and limited epochs, to the scientific probing of contemporary witness and punctilious precision of minute detail. The school of Freeman, Stubbs, Gardiner, and Bryce has quite displaced the taste of our grandfathers for artistic narrative and a glowing style. Where the older men thought of permanent literature, the new school is intent on scientific research.

James Anthony Froude, like Macaulay before him, aspired to combine both methods in one, so as to clothe his original researches in a graphic form. But, as not seldom happened to Macaulay himself, he convinced us much more of his brilliancy of touch than of any trustworthiness of judgment. He wrote with a purpose—he avowed a religious, social, and political purpose—and they who write history with a purpose of any kind but the love of truth are seldom or never impartial. To the fatal defect of being an enthusiastic defender of a cause and a man, Froude added a congenital incapacity to weigh evidence, and a truly morbid proneness to misquote documents and to misconceive language. The result is that we are compelled to regard him as belonging to the older historical school of the literary sort, and must put aside his claim to scientific research and exhaustive learning in all the original sources. Critics of another school than his, critics at once active, relentless, and numerous, hardly exaggerated his technical blunders and his historical deficiencies. Thus they have left on our generation the impression that Froude was a great writer, but not at all a great historian. And, though he had perhaps more merits than his critics allowed, it is rather as a great writer that it is now proposed to regard him. Great writers are so few nowadays that we cannot afford to neglect them.

There is more to be said for literary form in historical composition than the present generation is wont to allow. Abstracts of complicated documents with abundant archæological setting do not need any literary form, nor can they endure such setting any more than grammars, dictionaries, or catalogues of microscopic entozoa. But all compilations of original

research not fused into the form of art, remain merely the textbooks of the special student, and are closed to the general public. They have a purely esoteric value for the few, however profound be their learning, however brilliant the discoveries they set forth. Perhaps no historian in this century has exercised a more creative force over modern research than Savigny; but his great historical work is a closed book to the general public as much as is his purely legal work. Now, it is the public which history must reach, modify, and instruct, if it is to rise to the level of humane science and be more than pedantic antiquarianism. And nothing can reach the public as history, unless it be organic and proportioned in structure, impressive by its epical form, and instinct with the magic of life.

The colossal monuments compiled by Muratori, Pertz, and Migne are invaluable to the scholar, and so are *Catalogues of the Fixed Stars* to the astronomer, or the *Nautical Almanac* to the seaman. But to any but professed students of special subjects, the only real kind of history is a reduced miniature of the vast area of actual events, in such just proportion as to leave on the mind a true and memorable picture. A real history (and of a real history, the *Decline and Fall* is, at least in literary conception and plan, the ideal type) must be so artfully balanced in its proportion, that a true impression of the crucial events and dominant personalities is forced into the reader's brain. It has to be what a scientific globe or map is to our earth—a true copy reduced in accurate proportion and in dimensions measurable by the ordinary eye. Truth of proportion is far more essential than any accuracy of detail. Falsity of proportion is a blunder far more misleading than any meagreness of local definition.

To confuse the observer with a wilderness of details, and still more to mislead him by falsifying the relative nature of men and of things—this is to make a caricature, not a picture, a fancy sketch, not a chart. It will be as fatal to the reader as Ptolemaic maps were to the early navigators. A history wherein the pursuit of trivial facts is carried to confusion, and where the sense of faithful proportion is ruined by antiquarian curiosity, is little more than a comic photograph as taken in a distorted lens. The details may be accurate, curious, and inexhaustible; but the general effect is that of preposterous inversion. We learn nothing by the process. We are wearied and puzzled.

From these things—the Seven Deadly Sins of the learned—James Anthony Froude was conspicuously free. He never (or hardly ever) wearies us or puzzles us. As a master of clear, vivid, epical narration he stands above all his contemporaries. He chains our interest, brings us face to face with living men and women, leaves on our memory a definite stamp that does not fade, gives our brain much to ponder, to question, to investigate for ourselves. The result is that he is read, attacked, admired, condemned. But he is not put upon the shelf, and he will not be put upon the shelf. He is a popular writer of history, in the teeth of all his critics, and in spite of all his shortcomings—fierce as are the one, and grave as are the other. He is read, and no doubt deserves to be read, as Livy, Froissart, and Voltaire are read, for the sake of his graphic power in narration; which gives him more readers than Freeman, and more public influence than Stubbs or Gneist.

This power, this popularity, is unhappily compatible with great faults. True as it is that Froude rarely

burdens us with a wilderness of unimportant facts, we never feel sure that he has himself got hold of his facts by the right end. This does not always amount to anything that can be called a falsification of the record, but it too often leaves us with an impression as if we had got a slippery witness in the box, who might have been turned inside out, if he had been pressed with a closer sort of cross-examination. And then our historian, who too often regards himself as counsel for the defence, puts leading questions to his own witnesses, and grandly ignores the right of reply on the other side. It is true that grave doubts may exist if the proportion of men and events to the true scale of fact is at all what Froude depicts on his own ample canvas; but there is a clear sense of proportion in the general composition; an artistic balance of line and colour; a living portraiture of human characters and memorable scenes. And the result is that the present generation finds itself in presence of famous men and great crises such as have moulded nations from generation to generation. This gift is no small thing: hardly less important than the correction of a date, the exact name of some obscure tribe, or the authorship of a disputed document. Whatever the shortcomings of his research, Froude holds his own with the older masters of historical literature.

Style, like charity, 'shall cover the multitude of sins,' at least in the eyes of the multitude. And Froude has style: pure, natural, correct, and lucid. Simple, easy, and elegant, for all the ends of plain narrative, it can rise, at the need, into a fine glow, or thrill us with a splendid scene. From the negative point of view, Froude's English has hardly any real defect. It is easy without gross commonplace; flowing but not

diffuse; vivid without rhetoric; incisive without mannerism. It has none of the artifices of Macaulay, nor the grimaces of Carlyle, nor the froth of Alison, nor the grittiness of Hallam and Grote. As narrative it is excellent; and, without pretending that it reaches the higher flights of English prose, it paints the picturesque incidents of the story with true artistic power. It is by this that Froude is read and known. After all, it is the function of an historian to make known what he knows, to write so that what he writes shall be read and remembered. And thus it has come to pass, that in spite of his blunders, his partisanship, and his curious delusions, Froude's *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada* is familiar to the whole English-speaking world, whilst Hallam and Stanhope, Freeman and Stubbs, the Rolls and Camden Series of Chronicles, their learned editors and judicious compilers, are familiar only to special students.

Froude's style is so fascinating, and a fascinating style is so essential for true historical literature, that it may be worth while to note and examine a few average specimens of his method. We may take the opening of chapter iii—the Parliament of 1529. It is not a very brilliant passage; we may totally dispute the truth of its statements; we may hold it to be the view of a partisan in a strain of unwarranted encomium. But as a piece of lucid and emphatic writing, it must reach the Protestant heart and abide in the British mind.

'No Englishman can look back uninterested on the meeting of the Parliament of 1529. The era at which it assembled is the most memorable in the history of this country, and the work which it accomplished before its dissolution was of

larger moment politically and spiritually than the achievements of the Long Parliament itself. For nearly seven years it continued surrounded by intrigue, confusion, and at length conspiracy, presiding over a people from whom the forms and habits by which they had moved for centuries were falling like the shell of a chrysalis. While beset with enemies within the realm and without, it effected a revolution which severed England from the Papacy, yet it preserved peace unbroken and prevented anarchy from breaking bounds; and although its hands are not pure from spot, and red stains rest on them which posterity have bitterly and long remembered; yet if we consider the changes which it carried through, and if we think of the price which was paid by other nations for victory in the same struggle, we shall acknowledge that the records of the world contain no instance of such a triumph, bought at a cost so slight and tarnished by blemishes so trifling.—(*History*, chap. iii.)

Macaulay would have written that passage in a string of ringing antitheses; Carlyle would have given its spirit in a memorable phrase or two, uncouth, quaint, but not to be forgotten; Alison would have gushed on as if he were addressing a Tory Club; and Freeman would have ground it out with bald iteration, as if he were teaching a history class. But Froude's English, however unsound his sentiment, is understanded of the people and enjoyed by them at all times and in all places.

Froude is ever at his best with martyrdoms, trials, and executions, and of course he draws the moral of the religious struggle with unstinted zest. When Frith and Andrew the tailor were condemned to the stake, Cranmer wrote to a friend as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Froude quotes the letter and remarks on its tone—

'Those victims went as they were sentenced, dismissed to their martyrs' crowns at Smithfield, as Queen Anne Boleyn but a few days before had received her golden crown at the altar of Westminster Abbey. Twenty years later another fire was blazing under the walls of Oxford; and the hand which was now writing these light lines was blackening in the flames of it, paying there the penalty of the same "imagination" for which Frith and the poor London tailor were with such cool indifference condemned. It is affecting to know that Frith's writings were the instruments of Cranmer's conversion; and the fathers of the Anglican Church have left a monument of their sorrow for the shedding of this innocent blood in the order of the Communion Service, which closes with the very words on which the primate, with his brother bishops, had sat in judgment—("the natural body and blood of our Saviour Christ are in Heaven, and not here, it being against the truth of Christ's natural body to be at one time in more places than one"). The argument and the words in which it is expressed were Frith's.—(*History*, chap. v.)

This passage, with its obvious bearing on modern controversies about the Mass within the Church of England, is exactly in a form that cannot fail to stir the Protestant heart.

How vivid as well as true is this portrait of old Latimer—albeit full of truisms—

'His words are like the clear impression of a seal; the account and the result of observations, taken first hand, on the condition of the English men and women of his time, in all ranks and classes, from the palace to the prison. He shows large acquaintance with books; with the Bible, most of all; with patristic divinity and school divinity; and history, sacred and profane: but if this had been all, he would not have been the Latimer of the Reformation, and the Church of England would not, perhaps, have been here to-day. Like

the physician, to whom a year of practical experience in a hospital teaches more than a life of closet study, Latimer learnt the mental disorders of his age in the age itself; and the secret of that art no other man, however good, however wise, could have taught him. He was not an echo, but a voice; and he drew his thoughts fresh from the fountain—from the facts of the era in which God had placed him.'—(*History*, chap. vi.)

No finer epitaph on William Tyndal has been offered than this, when Froude speaks of Tyndal's translation as the basis of our received Version—

'It is substantially the Bible with which we are all familiar. The peculiar genius—if such a word may be permitted—which breathes through it—the mingled tenderness and majesty—the Saxon simplicity—the preternatural grandeur—unequalled, unapproached, in the attempted improvements of modern scholars—all are here, and bear the impress of the mind of one man—William Tyndal. Lying, while engaged in that great office, under the shadow of death, the sword above his head and ready at any moment to fall, he worked, under circumstances alone perhaps truly worthy of the task which was laid upon him—his spirit, as it were divorced from the world, moved in a purer element than common air.'—(*History*, chap. xii.)

Nor is Froude less in sympathy with a great Catholic martyr. His execution of More is a splendid page of history. He ends thus—

'This was the execution of Sir Thomas More, an act which was sounded out into the far corners of the earth, and was the world's wonder as well for the circumstances under which it was perpetrated, as for the preternatural composure with which it was borne. Something of his calmness may have been due to his natural temperament, something to an

unaffected weariness of a world which in his eyes was plunging into the ruin of the latter days. But those fair hues of sunny cheerfulness caught their colour from the simplicity of his faith; and never was there a Christian's victory over death more grandly evidenced than in that last scene lighted with its lambent humour.'—(*History*, chap. ix.)

The death of Cranmer rouses the Protestant historian to an even higher flight—

'So perished Cranmer. He was brought out, with the eyes of his soul blinded, to make sport for his enemies, and in his death he brought upon them a wider destruction than he had effected by his teaching while alive. Pole was appointed the next day to the See of Canterbury; but in other respects the Court had overreached themselves by their cruelty. Had they been contented to accept the recantation, they would have left the Archbishop to die broken-hearted, pointed at by the finger of pitying scorn; and the Reformation would have been disgraced in its champion. They were tempted, by an evil spirit of revenge, into an act unsanctified even by their own bloody laws; and they gave him an opportunity of redeeming his fame, and of writing his name in the roll of martyrs. The work of a man must be measured by his life, not by his failure under a single and peculiar trial. The Apostle, though forewarned, denied his Master on the first alarm of danger; yet that Master, who knew his nature in its strength and its infirmity, chose him for the Rock on which He would build His Church.'—(*History*, chap. xxxiii.)

These passages are cited, not as models of wisdom, of insight into character and movements, nor even as masterpieces of language. They lack the philosophic judgment of Thucydides and Machiavelli; they have not the cutting apophthegms of Tacitus and Gibbon, nor the splendour of Burke or the poetry of Carlyle. But, full of commonplaces as they are, they have that

easy, pure, intelligible eloquence which the general reader loves and comprehends, which gives him clear ideas to grasp, and thrilling scenes to recall; for all which he is grateful, and is quite right to be grateful. And perhaps in the end it is better that the general reader should be beguiled into taking too lenient an estimate of Cranmer, and Latimer, and Henry the Eighth, and too harsh an estimate of Elizabeth, Gardiner, and the Jesuits, than that he should feel no interest at all in them as men with purpose, brain, and courage, or that he should remember little of the history of his country but dim reminiscences from Mrs. Markham and Hume, school manuals, and special monographs. Froude at his best gives him something that can be called history, in a form that he can grasp and remember.

In telling a story and describing events, Froude is always interesting, clear, and effective, it may be not seldom at needless length; and usually he is thinking more of his scheme of colour than of the exact meaning of the documents before him. When he has to deal with a dramatic scene where his energy in original research is not seriously warped by zeal or haste, Froude gives us a splendid picture which may hold its own beside any in our historical literature. These are far too long to be quoted; but they are familiar to the whole reading world. The trial and execution of the martyrs—of the martyrs, be it fairly said, on both sides—the coronation, trial, and death of Anne Boleyn, the death and character of Mary Tudor, the intricacies of Elizabeth's statecraft—these things are told with masterly colour and force. The bitterness of party controversy, the indignation of learned archivists, has rather closed our eyes to the literary merit of Froude's

history. After all, the business of an historian is to arouse an interest in the past; and if Froude has not done this, it can be asserted of no writer in the present century.

Froude is of course of the followers of Herodotus and Livy in the past, and Voltaire and Robertson in the modern world, not of Thucydides and Tacitus, of Gibbon and Macaulay. He has neither the philosophy nor the genius of these ancient historians, nor the marvellous reading and portentous memory of our own historians. But in narration he is equal to the best; and where there is no ambiguity in the facts, and no cause to defend, he has reached a very high point. The fight with the Armada in the Channel and its ultimate fate have been told often before, but never with such zest and power. As a keen seaman, as an ardent Briton, Froude has thrown his whole soul into the task. But of all his scenes, that which dwells most on the memory is the execution of Mary Stuart. Not a point is lost, not a light nor a shade could be rendered more intense. It is the more interesting in that the historian is forced, almost against his will, to make a heroine of the woman whom he seems to execrate as a demon. It is usual to regard Macaulay as a consummate master of narration. But it would be hard to match in Macaulay's *History* any single scene so splendid as this. Macaulay's great tableaux, brilliant as they are, seem somewhat over-wrought in local detail, and he evidently delights in the less noble scenes and less crucial incidents. Neither of these defects can be found in the best examples of Froude. And if Macaulay cannot be said to surpass him in narrative, it can hardly be supposed that any other historian of our age has done so.

We have hitherto considered Froude as narrator—as a follower of Herodotus or Livy in painting a glowing tableau of patriotic stories. We must now consider him more strictly as historian, where it must be admitted he is hardly more than a real charlatan. Froude has been fiercely criticised for his blunders and his misquotations, his habit of substituting loose paraphrases for the words he professes to cite textually. The charge is true: it is grave; but it is not the worst of his defects as an historian of the higher rank. Froude, after his great exemplar, Livy, is a teller of graphic tales, a painter of character, nothing at all of the philosophic historian. He disdains the philosophy of human affairs, almost as an unholy prying into the mysterious ways of Providence. He tells us 'we should no more ask for a theory of this or that period of history than we should ask for a theory of *Macbeth* or *Hamlet*.' His whole conception of history is dramatic. '*Macbeth*,' he says, 'were it literally true, would be perfect history.' Again, he says, 'the most perfect English history which exists is to be found in the historical plays of Shakespeare.' This is to destroy the distinction between poetry and history—between ideal presentation of human passions and the scientific description of real events. We might as well say that the most perfect biography is a fine portrait on canvas, that the painter is the true recorder of the life. We might as well say that Snyders, or Landseer, or Bewick were the true naturalists, not Buffon, Cuvier, or Darwin. Dramatic poetry is one thing; scientific history is another thing.

Here we come down to the root of Froude's shortcomings as an historian. Pictorial effect, the dramatic elements of character, are always to him first and

foremost. They are first and foremost to the poet: and they ought to be. The dramatist is bound to heighten the lights of his leading characters, and to throw the lesser characters into a certain shade. The long labour of preparation, the slow evolutions of change, the infinite complexity of circumstance—all this the poet or the dramatist condenses into a few telling passages and rapid dialogues. His Achilles never rests, but is ever stormy, ruthless, self-willed; his Medea is ever proud and unbending; his Ino is all tears; his Orestes all groans. And so every character of the drama must be kept in its dramatic place and held rigidly to its type. *Macbeth* is a grand tragedy: but as to its being perfect history, even if every word in the play be literally true, were Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff the mere foils to the ambitious murderer, if we had their authentic history? The poet has to conceive spirit-stirring images and eminent natures in sensational conditions. The historian has to trace out a multitude of involved facts, and to describe the intricacies and evolutions of subtle causes and contradictory natures.

This, then, is the trap prepared for the historian who aspires to be a dramatist. He is consumed with a desire of 'effect,' not with a zeal for truth. And into this trap Froude fell; or rather he deliberately set up his workshop inside this trap, proclaiming it to be the true laboratory of history. As to the philosophy of history, he poured scorn on the idea. There is, he said, 'something incongruous in the very connection of such words as Science and History.' And he wrote and reprinted an address condemning what he called the 'Science of History.' No competent sociologist ever talked of a 'science of history,' but a science of society,

or social science. Of this science, history is the instrument or organ, to collect the facts on which the science is founded, just as 'natural history' describes the facts on which the 'Science of Life' is based. Indeed Froude, who talked about the 'science of history' like a raw curate denouncing Evolution in the pulpit, never even understood the aim of the science he undertook to demolish, and never grasped so much as its name or definition.

The great conception of Comte that human affairs, like physical facts, are ordered by *law*, and if so are properly subject to scientific analysis, has been so fully worked out in England by Mill, Spencer, Buckle, and an army of competent sociologists, that it would be useless in these days to argue it further with the theologians and metaphysicians who deny it. Froude is one who vehemently denies it: he gives a conspicuous example of the fatal consequences which denial involves. Of course, any philosophy of history or science of social affairs is a subject quite distinct from history. It is not the business of the historian to philosophise, or to construct elaborate theories of periods, movements, and revolutions. His business is to narrate events and to describe the acts of those who cause or who suffer them. But an historian who denies that any conceivable philosophy of human affairs is possible, who repudiates the possibility of any theory at all, who regards himself as an epic or dramatic poet constructing an effective work of art—such an one fails in the first condition of a great historian. And the wonder is that, with such a distorted conception of his task, Froude should not have given us dramas even more alien to truth.

There is something droll in Froude's protest against

any theorising in history. The historian, he says in an address, must not tell us what he himself thinks about the facts. But this is exactly what Froude is perpetually doing. His whole treatment of the Tudor monarchy, of the Reformation, of the Counter-Reformation, of the Jesuits and Catholic parties, is saturated with statements of what he thinks about the facts. It is impossible to write coherent history of great movements without some 'theory'; and Froude avows that he begins his history with a theory, works it out with a theory, and concludes with a theory. He constructs far more 'theories' than Gibbon, Macaulay, Carlyle, or Freeman; he draws the moral, in his own words, about events and men far more often than any of these. When he occupies whole chapters to prove that Henry the Eighth was a benevolent king, that Mary Stuart was a treacherous fiend, he has a very definite theory which he sets himself to justify. Whether his theories are just or not, is a separate question. But few historians have ever laid down theories of characters and events in more emphatic lines, or have laboured more zealously to defend them.

Being full of theories of his own, coming to his task with the avowed purpose of advocating those theories and of setting aside current theories of others, Froude very much increased the difficulty of strict impartiality, already imperilled by his idea of viewing historic events in the light of dramatic poems. The temptation was irresistible, that what was dramatically effective must be good history. The test of credibility was fitness for its pictorial purpose. There is a curious example of this in a note (vol. vi. p. 96), when he tells the story of Mary Tudor saying that Calais would be written on her heart. Froude calls this an 'apocryphal or vaguely

attested anecdote.' He adds: 'The story is not particularly characteristic, *but having come somehow into existence, there is no reason why it should not continue* TO BE BELIEVED.' If it were characteristic, it must be true! But, apocryphal or vaguely attested as it is, we are told to believe a popular tale, because people have believed it, we know not why. This is indeed to turn history into historical romance. *Se non è vero, è ben trovato.*

To review Froude's historical 'theories'—the political and social doctrines, the new estimate of persons, the paradoxes and prejudices, whereof his history is compounded, and to justify which he undertook it from the first—this would require a big volume and not an essay. The independent view, neither Protestant nor Catholic, a friendly judgment upon a great English writer, will perhaps amount to this—that Froude, whilst giving us all a most fascinating book with endless problems to meditate, has done something of what he designed to do, but far from all that he sought. He has given us a telling picture of the social and economical struggles when the modern society of England supplanted the mediæval society, and the modern monarchy and aristocracy supplanted the feudal monarchy and aristocracy. He has convinced the general reader that Henry the Eighth was not the melodramatic Bluebeard of popular legends, but a king rather like the monarchs and rulers of his own age. He has not convinced either scholars or public that Henry was a wise, virtuous, and conscientious statesman.

He has made it difficult to believe that Anne Boleyn, or the Seymours, or Mary Tudor, or Mary Stuart were saints, patriots, or martyrs. But he has wholly failed to convince us that the Reformation of Henry the

Eighth and Edward the Sixth was an unqualified blessing, the work of patriotic and godly men. And he has convinced none but those who needed no convincing, that the Jesuit reaction was inspired by a Satanic spirit of evil. He has shown us better than any other historian how the Established Church of England gradually crystallised into the thing we know; but he will not convince those who are not Churchmen to take quite so indulgent a view of its founders. He has made the general reader understand how many deductions must be made from the legends of 'Good Queen Bess,' and he has drawn in impressive lines the vacillations, hardness, duplicity, and ingratitude of Elizabeth. But he has not convinced us that the great queen was wholly devoid of greatness in statecraft and continually brought her country to the verge of ruin. The monograph of Professor Beesly presents a far truer judgment of the queen, and serves to show us where and how Froude has mistaken her. The dominant themes of Froude's *History* are the rehabilitation of Henry the Eighth, the glorification of the English Reformation, and the indictment of Elizabeth as a ruler. It must be admitted that Froude has not reversed the verdict of historians in any one of these three cardinal points.

It remains to notice the strange habit of inaccuracy, looseness of reference, of misquotation and misconception, with which Froude has been charged. No one who has not collated some of his references and compared his paraphrases with the originals, can easily imagine the extent to which these inaccuracies go. After making a collation of the *Letters* of Thomas Carlyle as published by Froude and as published by Charles Eliot Norton, I wrote as follows: 'He system-

atically alters the punctuation, words, and phrases; drops out whole sentences, paragraphs, and pages; rewrites passages in his own words, and tacks bits of passages together into new sentences.' He has done this in the *Carlyle*, in the *Erasmus*, and throughout the *History*. I made this charge nine years ago; I know of no answer to it; and I still adhere to it. I give a striking example of the effect of this method. In the Appendix to vol. ii. pp. 599-655, *Fresh Evidence about Anne Boleyn*, Froude writes about the death of Queen Catherine as follows (p. 619, 12mo ed. 1881)—

'One curious circumstance is mentioned about her death. Chapuys writes that when *in extremis* she declared to her physician qu'elle n'avoit oncques este cogneu du Prince Arthur, mais la marisson et trouble le luy fit oublier (Chapuys to Granvelle, 21 Janvier).'

Here Mr. Froude professes to be quoting from the Vienna archives, and to give the exact words and spelling. On the authority of the emperor's ambassador in England, he tells us that Queen Catherine, with her dying breath, asserted that the first marriage with Arthur had never been consummated; and we know the strange importance which ecclesiastical casuistry attached to that point in the divorce proceedings. It happens that a foreign historian, far more versed in palæography and more careful than Mr. Froude, has published this very passage from the despatch in a correct form. It may be seen in Paul Friedmann's *Anne Boleyn* (vol. ii. p. 161, 8vo, Macmillan, 1884). Here it is—

'E. Chapuis to N. de Granvelle, January 21, 1536, *Vienna Archives*, P.C. 230, i. fol. 21.—Javoye appointe avec le mede-

cin de la Royne, que survenant quelque danger en elle il se souvint et tinsse main quelle affirmat in extremis quelle navoyt oncques este cogneue du prince artus.'

The meaning of this is plain. Chapuis informs Granvelle that he had arranged with the queen's physician, that when danger arose in her condition, he should remember and take care that she affirmed *in extremis* that she had never been known by Prince Arthur, but grief and agitation *made him forget to do so.* The passage is quite correctly translated in the *Rolls Calendars—Foreign and Domestic*, 27 Hen. VIII., vol. x. p. 54. Mr. Froude turns Chapuis' account of his little plot to induce the queen to make a dying statement into an assertion that the queen voluntarily did make the statement, although Chapuis goes on to say how the plot was made abortive. Mr. Friedmann correctly explains the case (p. 161, vol. ii.): 'After this consultation, Chapuis had a request to make. Being a practical man, he thought of the great lawsuit at Rome, and expressed a wish that if the Queen suddenly became worse she should, shortly before her death, solemnly declare her marriage with Prince Arthur had never been consummated. De Lasco promised that this should be done.' Chapuis then explains that it was not done, and why it was not done. And yet Mr. Froude goes to Vienna and cites this very passage to prove the contrary.

The matter is not very important, but every one can note the variants between the words and the spelling in this and hundreds of quotations made by Froude, when compared with more careful extracts. How he understood the last sentence of his own citation about *marisson* and *trouble* it is not easy to see. But things

like this make one doubt whether we ought to put any trust at all in Froude's citations of unpublished documents and MSS. at Simancas or Vienna. Mr. Froude published his *Catherine of Aragon* in 1891. Yet he allowed his absurd blunder about Catherine's last words to remain uncorrected, although the true meaning of the words he perverts had been shown in the *Calendar* published in 1887, and by Mr. Friedmann in 1884.

An amusing example of Mr. Froude's inveterate habit of blundering is given in the *Quarterly Review* (No. 375, July 1898). The reviewer cites a passage about Reuchlin of eighteen lines from Mr. Froude's *Erasmus* (p. 172), and he tells us that it 'contains *one*, and only *one* correct statement.' And fifteen other statements of fact about Reuchlin are all inaccurate. The reviewer adds: 'In the case of Mr. Froude, the problem ever is to discover whether he has deviated into truth.' So far as concerns exact transcription of documents, precise use of language, and minute fidelity of detail, this severe judgment cannot be held to be exaggerated.

At the close of his life, in his *Catherine of Aragon* (1891)—inscribed on its title-page as 'a supplementary volume to the Author's *History of England in usum laicorum*'—Mr. Froude expounds his theory of writing history in an introductory chapter. Here we have in his own words his truly fatal method of work. 'The mythic element cannot be eliminated out of history,' he says. On the contrary, Mr. Froude revels in the mythic element, as did the author of *Macbeth*. 'I do not pretend to impartiality,' he says. As Alison wrote history to prove that Providence was always on the side of the Tories, so Froude wrote his history to

prove that Providence was always on the side of the Reformers. 'I believe the Reformation to have been the greatest incident in English history,' he tells us. And then he justifies his preposterous hallucination of looking for truth in Acts of Parliament: 'The preambles of Acts of Parliament did actually represent the sincere opinion of the educated laymen of England.' This is one of the main sources of Froude's errors. The preambles of Tudor Acts were hardly more veracious than the proclamations of Philip the Second or Catherine de Medicis. If Mr. Froude had only had a year or two of training in the Courts of Law or the House of Commons, or in public affairs! He seems as innocent of public life as an old-fashioned parson in a retired country parish.

'The public,' he says, 'took an interest in what I had to say.' Certainly! he is a fascinating writer, who holds us with his glittering eye: we cannot choose but hear. 'The book was read, and continues to be read,' he says with quiet pride. It is read: it will be read: it ought to be read. Mr. Froude is a brilliant writer. He has written of a stirring and momentous epoch in our island story with native eloquence, genuine enthusiasm, and epic colour. Not a few of his episodes are as substantially true as they are romantic in form. His misconceptions, his blunders, his prejudices must be carefully watched, guarded against, and corrected. The world will read him as it reads Pope's *Homer*. Pope's *Iliad* is not Homer's *Iliad*, but it is a splendid bit of versification. Froude's *History of England* is far from being trustworthy; but it is a fine composition which, if it has not the monumental veracity of Thucydides, has much of the pictorial charm of Herodotus and Livy.

CHAPTER XIII

HISTORICAL METHOD OF FREEMAN

It would be no easy task fully to describe the varied influence of the late Professor Edward A. Freeman on historical learning in England. He effected almost a revolution in the methods of study, and he founded a school, the fruits of which have yet to be gathered in. His work in guiding and stimulating the studies of others was, no doubt, far greater than any literary performance of his own, considerable as these were. He will be remembered, if not so much as a great historian, as a devoted adherent of original authorities.

No doubt he carried his own admirable zeal for truth into a certain exaggeration, which, if it lessened his popularity with the public for his own case, has led his feebler imitators into a great deal of barren pedantry. The range of his historical studies was really wide, but it recognised very rigid limits of its own. The Professor hardly ever touched any history of the antique world but that of Greece and Rome, and he rarely referred to anything later than the fifteenth century in Europe. The modern State system, the Reformation, the religious and civil wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the commercial and colonial wars of the eighteenth century, the intellectual, social, and political revolutions of the last one hundred and fifty years; the entire history of

France, Italy, Spain, and Germany later than the feudal ages; the foundation and growth of the British Empire, of the United States; the entire history of Africa, Asia, and America, from the age of Menes to our own day—all this hardly calls out a single allusion in the many works of Freeman.

No one can suppose that he was in any sense ignorant of this enormous mass of history, which he resolutely ignores as part of his system. However much it interested him, he forbore to write about anything which he had not probed in his own way. His supreme merit as historian is to have insisted in season and out of season on the *Unity of History*. But his own practice did not altogether do justice to his great theory. Those who do not know his occasional essays and voluminous notes and articles might imagine that he confined himself to the grand struggle between English, Danes, and Normans. And it must be admitted that with all his passion for having the whole of history read together as one continuous biography of Man, he speaks at times as if Gauls, the Latin races altogether, and modern men in general, were a poor and degenerate race, whose scuffles and vagaries need not detain 'a serious historian' bent on attaining to the higher truth.

This was assuredly not the tone of the famous Rede lecture of 1872. That was in some respects the broadest and most masterly of all Freeman's essays. We must cast away all distinctions of 'ancient' and 'modern,' of 'dead' and 'living,' and must boldly grapple with the great fact of the unity of history. As man is the same in all ages, the history of man is one in all ages. This, and all the reasoning by which the lecturer supported and illustrated his argu-

ment, was a powerful corrective of the pedantry which had led the universities to approach history through the avenue of classical literature. 'European history,' he declares, 'from its first glimmerings to our own day, is one unbroken drama, no part of which can be rightly understood without reference to the other parts which come before and after it.' We must look at the history of man, he adds, *at all events at the history of Aryan man in Europe*, as one unbroken whole, no part of which can be safely looked at without reference to other parts.

Here we have Freeman's philosophy of history in all its strength and also in its weakness. His conception of the unity of history, that 'the history of man is one in all ages,' is truly and strongly grasped. It is the very foundation of a philosophical view of the human record. No English historian, no English philosopher, has ever stated it with such an inner hold on its meaning. Neither Macaulay nor Hallam, neither Grote nor Finlay, neither Milman nor Froude, ever press this idea of the unity of history upon our minds. Mill and Spencer hold the doctrine, but neither of them are in any sense historians, and Spencer finds little at all to interest him in the history of any but uncivilised men. But Freeman, whilst holding the continuity of history as firmly as Mill himself, possessed an intimate knowledge of large parts of the vast human record.

Unfortunately, our Professor weakened the force of his own teaching by a fatal qualification. His statement of the unity of man's history wanted nothing in breadth, in fervour, and intensity of grasp, until he limited it to 'the history of the Aryan nations in Europe.' 'European history,' he says, 'is one un-

broken drama.' 'The history of Aryan man in Europe is one unbroken whole.' This is a fatal concession to classical pedantry and modern conceit. By placing the history of Greece and of Rome, and then of mediæval North Europe, on a pedestal above all other history, Freeman spoiled the philosophical basis on which he was entrenched. All the new researches into prehistoric ages, and the early career of African and Asian races, by which history and philosophy have been so greatly inspired, the immense developments of industrial, social, political, and religious life in these recent centuries—all this was almost a closed book to the learned historian of Greeks and Angles. In the result, in spite of the truly ample form in which he announced the conception of the unity of history, in practice he rather reserved his passionate enthusiasm for the three phases of Greek, Roman, and Teutonic civilisation, and the latter only in its mediæval age. In all of these, Freeman is an acute and profound scholar. But, as nine-tenths of human history left him without much living interest, he missed a true philosophy of history.

The vague and halting language which Freeman uses about scientific history in his six lectures on *Comparative Politics*, 1873, sufficiently proves that he had no real grasp on social philosophy at all. In a characteristic note, he tells us it were better the science should 'go nameless than bear the burden of such a name as, for instance, *Sociology*.' When he talks about the supreme discovery of the comparative method in philology, in mythology, in politics, and history, as a memorable stage in the progress of the human mind, he betrays a curious confusion of thought. To put the scientific laws of human evolution on a level with

comparative mythology and philology is to take a very low conception of the great achievement of our century. The comparative method is a valuable resource in sociology, as it is in biology; but it is only one of many methods, and to erect it into a science by itself is wholly misleading. The study of human fictions, myths, and beliefs (the study of religious evolution, in fact) is an important element in sociology, and so is the study of the evolution of language. And the study of comparative politics is also a part of the entire science of social evolution. But all of these are merely some of the instruments and methods of a comprehensive science of human society. They are as completely subordinate to this larger science, and are as completely its aids and servants, as embryology is subordinate to biology, or barology to physics. And to sneer at the term *Sociology*, which is accepted by all competent philosophers, and which illustrates in its formation the abiding combination of Greek thought and Roman civilisation, is in these days a droll bit of pedantic ill-humour. The six lectures on *Comparative Politics* contain a mass of valuable learning, and are full of most interesting teaching upon history; but they prove that Professor Freeman, however great as a scholar and a student, had but slight grasp of a sound philosophy of history, and had no very definite philosophy of history of his own.

It is as historian, in the strict sense of the term, not as philosopher, that Freeman's true strength lay. The two offices are distinct. And though it is a defect in an historian to be without a competent philosophy of his own art, it is not at all decisive of failure. Freeman had a grasp of the past in its living reality far too broad and too tenacious to allow himself to revel in

the Biblical mysticism which satisfied Carlyle, Ruskin, and Froude. Freeman distinctly recognised the great truth that the facts of man's career (or rather of Aryan man's career in Europe) might conceivably be stated in terms of some general laws. And this, together with his own marvellous industry and his passionate thirst for seeing the past as it really was, kept him ever the steadfast historian of truth, and not of mere imagination.

Professor Freeman abundantly expounded and illustrated his own historical method in the nine lectures delivered from his chair in 1884. He there reinforces the doctrine of the unity of history—'the truth which ought to be the centre and life of all our historic studies'—as formally stated in the Rede lecture, which he now traces back to Thomas Arnold. Nothing can be better than his protest against dividing up history into 'ancient' and 'modern,' against allowing classical purism to dictate to the student of history. And his argument would have been both stronger and sounder if he had recognised, not merely continuity and unity in history, but organic evolution and the development of the present from the past. Although there is no arbitrary gulf between 'ancient' and 'modern' history, although all history is one continuous narrative of progressive civilisation, although the comparison of institutions and societies in times old and new be most fruitful and instructive, still the 'new' world never can reproduce the 'old' world, and is a wholly different thing: there are no true 'cycles' in human development; history never repeats itself; the Greco-Roman world has only distant analogies with the Feudal-Catholic world, just as this has only distant analogies with the Revolutionary world. The great

phases of human civilisation are contrasted rather than compared: they differ as infancy, childhood, manhood, and senility differ in the individual. Sociology deals not so much with the relations of institutions *inter se*, as with the evolution of society, of thoughts, of manners, of activities, and ideals.

All that the Professor writes on the scope and difficulties of historical study is excellent. And not less so is his memorable protest against the sacrifice of historical truth to literary brilliance of form. He rises into a noble eloquence in the second Oxford lecture of 1884, when he speaks of the temptations that beset the writer and the reader of history, when either is allured by the spell of attractive narration. We all know how this resulted to Freeman's own successor, of whom perhaps he was thinking when he took up his parable with such prophetic vehemence against 'the evil fortune of mistaking falsehood for truth.'

He speaks wisely and distinctly when he says, that 'in historical writing, narrative and description, though very far from being the whole of the matter, are no small part of it.' It would be difficult to find a better statement of the truth. Freeman's practice in this matter hardly illustrated his theory. Style, form, literary terseness, and brilliancy never were Freeman's forte. And, unfortunately, it is his longer and more elaborate performances that are most jejune. He could write finely at times, as we see in many parts of his essays and addresses. Rome, Byzantium, Athens stirred him to eloquence. He wrote always correctly and clearly; and he thought that enough for the historian. But the enormous length of his *Norman Conquest* and *William Rufus*, with the abysmal notes

and mighty index, the *Sicily* and the *Old English History*, are so much overladen with trivial details, told with such portentous long-windedness, that only professional students, examinees, school-teachers, and school-scholars really master them. Narrative and description, he truly says, are no small part of historical writing. Amplification, interminable detail, and the pedagogue's desire to correct every conceivable blunder into which the reader might stray, grew upon him, until, in the greater histories, flesh and blood wearies of committing to memory, and even of reading, the mountains of information with which the learned historian is charged.

Hence Freeman retained to the last a great deal of the pedagogue in manner, though he was no professional teacher, even in his Oxford chair. What would have been the result if Gibbon had poured out on us all that he had ever read or copied into his notebooks; or if Thucydides had put into eight volumes, instead of eight chapters, all that he had ever heard told him? Not only does Freeman amplify his historical narrative till it becomes wearisome to all save the systematic student, but when he has to limit himself to a short narration, he becomes almost commonplace and dull. A few hundred pages do not offer him space enough to deploy his hoplites. Having published his monumental history of the *Norman Conquest*, whereof the life and work of William himself fills two or three thousand pages, Freeman was induced to write the *Life* of the Conqueror in two hundred pages for a popular series. No man living had anything like his consummate knowledge of the subject, or had more perfect command of all the materials. One would have thought that Freeman would have produced a fascinating

biography almost *stans pede in uno,* without preparation or labour. But he did not seem to enjoy the task; and the book he produced is the least interesting of all his works.[1]

All that Freeman said or wrote about original authorities is truly excellent. It is doubtless the most important part of his teaching. He opens the fourth Oxford lecture with the excellent maxim: 'The kernel of all sound teaching in historical matters is the doctrine that no historical study is of any value which does not take in a knowledge of original authorities.' He carefully explains that 'take in' does not mean 'limit itself to,' as some of the Freemannikins absurdly pretend. And he explains with singular clearness and judgment what constitutes an 'original authority' in the best sense — those who wrote from their own first-hand knowledge after careful weighing of all the available witnesses. Again, he fully allows the importance of many truly original authorities other than written narratives, such as official documents, treaties, statutes, coins, inscriptions, drawings, buildings, and many physical evidences and monuments.

The numerous works of Freeman present us with examples of how original authorities may be tested, combined, and used. It will be noticed that he says but little of the use of unpublished manuscripts. A vulgar impression existed at one time that Freeman composed his histories largely from such unedited manuscripts, and he tells us that he was once asked if

[1] He never hesitated to infuse into his writing antique words, in their original alphabetic form. Thus he wrote: 'He who chooses a great writer of any age as his book, does in some sort enroll himself in the *comitatus* of the writer of that book. He seeks him to lord; he becomes his man; he owes him the honourable duty of a faithful ἑταῖρος or *gesið*; he does not owe him the cringing worship of the δοῦλος or the *þeow*.'

any of the authorities he used had ever been printed. We now know that Freeman made no use in practice of unedited manuscripts; and he hardly ever resorted to them except for some special or occasional reference. Therein he showed his sound judgment. The deciphering and copying of antique manuscripts is a special art, of immense difficulty and laboriousness, and for the early Middle Ages, at any rate, requires many years of special study, and is complicated with knotty problems of the age, the country, the language, the profession, and the personal equation of each particular writer. For a man like Professor Freeman, who was dealing with at least ten centuries in most of the countries of Europe, to have mastered the palæography of all the original authorities was a physical impossibility. To have attempted it would have been a melancholy waste of his time and labour. And he very properly left this curious and rare learning to the experts, palæographers, and editors of special epochs, to whom it naturally belongs.

A good deal of querulous pedantry has been wasted in the effort to prove that Freeman knew nothing of 'original authorities,' that he misused the authorities he had, and indeed was a mere smatterer in 'historical research.' Much of all this detraction is simply a matter of language: the rest of it is the vanity and spitefulness which seem to infect the palæographic pedant. One who has established a little preserve of his own in one of these corners of archæology, is too apt to regard himself as the only 'authority' privileged to reveal the real truth, and he is wont to fly at any intruder like the dog on a butcher's cart. If 'historical research' is a term limited to original examination of unedited and unknown documents, Freeman, we are

glad to know, gave little of his time to such studies. And if this want displaces him from the rank of those historians who have failed to resort to 'original authorities,' it is a defect which he shares with Thucydides and Tacitus, with Gibbon and Grote, and to a great extent with Mommsen and Carlyle. 'Original authorities' with Freeman meant those who wrote from first-hand knowledge after careful weighing of all the available witnesses.

Freeman, of course, made mistakes: sometimes he would misunderstand or over-value a particular chronicler; sometimes he slipped by an oversight, and now and then from prejudice. It is the lot of mortals. It has been suspected of Gibbon, and frequently proved against Carlyle. But Freeman as a whole, considering the bulk of his material, is eminently painstaking, accurate, and trustworthy. And the extremely petty character of the blunders with which he is charged, and the pertinacious ill-nature with which these have been attacked, is good evidence of his substantial authority in the main. The pretence that Freeman wrote his histories for experts only, and not for the world, that he was not so much the literary historian as the compiler of palæographic monographs, is a laughable bit of sophistical disparagement. That Freeman's highly coloured pictures of Alfred and the Saxon heroes, of Canute and Harold, of William and of Rufus, are mere 'studies' for experts, and are not meant to be histories—a *κτῆμα εἰς ἀεὶ* for the English public—is not worth a serious answer.

But though Freeman was an historian and not a palæographic expert, he never denied the great importance of scholarly monographs based on contemporary documents. Of course, the great bulk of his

own 'authorities' were such monographs, as always the bulk of material for sound history must be. No one has ever doubted, no sound historian could doubt, the indispensable nature of such work. But the historian is no more bound to decipher manuscripts with his own eyes than he is bound to print his books with his own hands. Decipherers and historians have each their own task. And it is an idle sneer to deny that Freeman was a trustworthy historian because he was not a professional palæographer.

A great amount of folly and cant is now current about 'original authorities,' as if these could be nothing but unedited manuscripts. A truly preposterous attention and an unreal value are now being given to unedited manuscripts, as if these were the sole resources of the historian, and as if he had always to decipher them with his own eye. No doubt 'original authorities' existed once in manuscript. But, happily, the larger part have long been edited and commented on by learned experts and scholars. When we get to the seventeenth century, the laborious historian may himself use manuscripts with freedom, as has been done with such admirable results by Macaulay, Carlyle, S. R. Gardiner, C. H. Firth, and others. But for the historian of early ages, dealing with an ample field of many centuries, to embarrass himself with palæography, except of necessity, is a wanton waste of force and a great source of error. We know the welter of confusion into which Froude floundered when he went to Vienna and Simancas. Palæography is a very complicated and difficult art, and there is a special palæography for almost every century, each country, and almost every class and person. Freeman had other things to do than to acquire this art. He never

pretended to have done so, and neither his precept nor his example gave any sort of countenance to the current palæographic superstitions.

Of course, it is of importance that all manuscript authorities of the smallest value should be accurately deciphered, copied, and edited. And the work that is being done by competent editors is excellent material for the future historians. But it is quite distinct from the work of the historian proper; although, where the age is not distant, and the subject of the history limited to a generation or two, a wise historian like Mr. S. R. Gardiner will resort to the unedited material himself. But the fashion of the day is to attach a mystical value to a bit of written paper, however trivial be the writing on it, and however great a fool or liar the writer may have been. Raw girls, who could tell us nothing about the battle of Salamis or the French Convention, are encouraged to devote years of their lives to deciphering the washing accounts of a mediæval convent, the lists of the swine on a particular manor, or the tittle-tattle of some bedchamber woman. It is conceivable that a competent historian might make use of washing-bills, farm-inventories, and chambermaids' scandal. But, until he asks for it, it is childish to call this rubbish 'original work,' simply because it can be made out from a mouldy bit of paper in an illegible hand of some centuries ago. What sort of 'history' of the reign of Victoria would be concocted if the learned historian rigidly confined himself to the 'original authorities' to be found in the private correspondence of members of Parliament, lords- and ladies-in-waiting, valets, and housemaids, as it passed through the Post Office, or was entered in their diaries? To this folly Freeman gave no kind of support, either by

teaching or in practice. He did quite the contrary; though he is often cited as if, by relying on 'original authorities,' he attached a special and sacramental efficacy to any bit of old paper. The 'originality' of the document is not important. The real question concerns the knowledge, the good sense, the good faith of the man or woman who wrote on the paper.

There is great danger in our time that we fall into error by exaggerating the importance of what is known as 'new material' and 'unpublished manuscripts.' The raw B.A.'s fresh from the schools' examinations, who concoct anonymous reviews, make a fuss about any 'new material,' however trivial and mendacious, and treat with sovereign disdain anything composed from sources in print. But 'new material' and 'unpublished manuscripts' may be utterly misleading, and, *ex hypothesi*, are often secret, one-sided, prejudiced, and malicious. We see the lying stuff which is poured out daily in the Continental press about all international affairs. All that torrent of venom and fable is unpublished manuscript till it gets into type. The private despatches, diaries, and memoranda in the chanceries, offices, and pigeon-holes of governments are often little more trustworthy and impartial. But if any of these hurried, partisan, and uncorrected effusions chance to be preserved for two or three centuries, it becomes 'new material,' to be treated by foolish people as if it were as sacred as Holy Writ.

What sort of a 'history' of our own generation would result if the historian relied upon his exclusive access to the private letters, diaries, or memoranda kept by the secretaries or the confidants of any amongst our leading politicians, or by the editor of a party journal? Some curious revelations there might be;

but how little to be trusted as complete or conclusive! No doubt, if *every* letter, memorandum, conversation, and private discussion were together before the historian, as fully and truthfully as they are believed to be known to the Recording Angel above, a great historian of vast industry and high judicial power would at last reach the truth. But this is what we never have, and never can have. A bit of the 'original manuscripts' chances to be preserved—the mere flotsam and jetsam of some huge wreck; perhaps, it may be, one is saved where a hundred are lost. It may be useful: the chances are that it is unimportant; but, taken alone as an *authority*, it may be utterly misleading. Even such historians as Macaulay and Gardiner, masters as they are of the entire printed and manuscript materials of the brief period they study, seem at times disposed to trust over much to the private opinions, hearsay, and scandal sent home to his employers, or sent off to amuse a friend, by some envoy, secretary, agent, or correspondent. The historian has access only, on each point, to at most two or three such diaries, despatches, and correspondences; and the temptation is great to rely on what he has got or has found. Where great men feel the temptation, little men fall before it. They share the prejudices of the writer, and they reproduce his libels and his blunders. When one sees how unpublished manuscripts have been used by the friends and enemies in turn of such struggles as the Reformation, the Civil Wars, the French Revolution, and the Irish Troubles, one is tempted to look with suspicion on 'extracts' and summaries of manuscript sources which we have not before us. It were safer that 'new material' should be left to the really great historians who devote whole

lives and vast learning to a short period. It is a very dangerous tool in the hands of the lads and lasses who swagger about with it in public.

To this conceited fad Freeman gave no countenance at any time. He never doubted the central truth that history in the higher sense can only be composed with brains. Brains, knowledge of men, insight into things political and social, are the indispensable qualities for the historian. Industry, accuracy, impartiality, patience, wide culture, literary power—all these are good and needful; but they may all be rendered nugatory without the brain to understand politics and men of action. As the painter, asked how he mixed his glowing colours, replied that 'he mixed them with brains,' so the historian may reply that it is with brains that he truly records the past. The modern superstition that the past can be interpreted by laboriously copying out and piecing together such scraps of written paper as time has chanced to spare did not satisfy Freeman. The historian, first and foremost, must be a politician, in the sense of having the instinct and experience which give him the understanding of political acts and persons.

Now, Freeman was a politician, as was his master Thomas Arnold, as was Macaulay, as was Gibbon, as were de Commines and Machiavelli. Freeman was a politician; and for all his vast learning and patient collation of every written authority, he looked at men and events with a political eye, and with the grasp of a practical politician. It is unfortunately true that Freeman as a politician had many of the defects of that quality. He had prejudices—some really furious prejudices; he had race antipathies, religious odium, loathing of particular schools of thought, of nations, and writers. All this deeply discredited his impar-

tiality as a general authority on universal history—a pretension indeed which he would have been the first to disclaim. It made several of his judgments unsound and some of them laughably unfair. His contemptuous ignoring of almost every deed, man, or movement in any member of the Latin races, later at least than the fifteenth century, his hatred of all Buonapartes [*sic*], his contempt for the eighteenth century and all its works in Europe, his loathing of Turks and all things Turkish—these things detract from his standing as a great historian, but happily they did not seriously affect his principal tasks. If they led to an extravagant enthusiasm for Saxon Englishmen and their influence on the world, they do not deform his estimate of Charles and Alfred, Harold and William, the two Emperors Frederick, and Edward the First. This was Freeman's true field; and, when he left it, he was often far from an infallible guide. But the very energy of his prejudices showed that he was no mere antiquary, copying out the notes of annalists, but was a man of strong political ideas seeking to judge men and to understand their acts.

There is another habit of mind, almost as essential to the historian as the political habit, and that is familiarity with the methods of proof which trained lawyers require as evidence. No historian has ever insisted so ably and at such length on the nature of trustworthy evidence as did Freeman. His teaching of his own method is excellent, his own practice leaves much to be desired. But for his personal prejudices, Freeman might have made a fair judge of a superior court. His patience and industry, his accuracy, his respect for written authority, and his passion for comparing and weighing evidence, were all eminently

judicial. And his essays are models of the art of patiently collecting all the available evidence and then of weighing it in a balance, step by step, as to its comparative value. Freeman, of course, was not by any means the first historian to do this; nor has his system advanced on all that had been done long before him in Germany. But he has done more perhaps than any Englishman before him to explain the method in use, to illustrate his own injunctions, and to urge its immense importance.

There is a branch of the use of historical evidence which the zealous students of documents usually neglect, unless they have had something like a serious legal training. The lawyer is habitually slow to accept the statements of fact in documents laid before him until these statements have been tested in cross-examination, and until the character of the witness has been laid bare in open court. He knows that in disputed cases of fact, whole mountains of affidavits and paper evidence suggest to him little more than *prima facie* presumptions, until ample proof has been given of the credibility, good faith, and first-hand knowledge of the author of each document. Now, the facts in dispute in doubtful matters of history are enormously more complex and obscure than the evidence in any single cause at trial. The documentary evidence laid before the historian forms but casual scraps of information in comparison with the evidence in a cause prepared by experts having large compulsory powers. Yet the historian can use nothing but the documents that chance has left him; and all cross-examination and serious testing of the witnesses' veracity and knowledge are out of the question. The cases are rare indeed where a judge would feel certainty on mere

documentary evidence such as that which is the sole resource of the historian. The judge knows how often the whole apparatus of justice fails to reach the facts of a simple matter. The historian—even the most patient and judicious of historians—insensibly comes to credit his documents, or some of them; and he rarely admits to himself that he has no adequate means of reaching the truth of tangled events, where the actors intended to mislead each other, the world, and posterity. The historian habitually shrinks from a verdict of 'Not Proven,' though his bare documents—untested, ancient, and casual as they are—seldom enable him to go further in disputed facts.

Nearly all historians who attempt to give, with photographic minuteness, the exact details of complicated and obscure events, are wont to overrate the possibility of reaching the truth with the resources they have. It is the besetting weakness of the most industrious and careful of historians. The masses of documents they have accumulated always seem to promise them certainty. It is a common delusion. Masses of documents will little avail where it is impossible to ask a single question, to hear a single witness speak, or to pass one inch outside the paper fragments which ruthless time may have spared. It is the Nemesis of the modern mania for original research and special detail. Now Freeman, in his lectures and essays, often warns students against this very error. In his third Oxford address, he very humorously showed how easy it was to be misled by a witness whom you could not cross-examine. In practice, he too often fell into the mistake of many learned historians, who imagine that unwearied diligence, great accuracy of reading, and constant collation of

documents, will enable them to give a detailed narrative of complicated events, centuries old, with all the minute fidelity of a *Times*' report of a parliamentary debate. It fascinates us, until the endless bulk of detail wearies us; then we lose all sense of proportion, and are puzzled by the hordes of small facts that press on the memory; and at last we toss aside the interminable volumes, each of which carries us only a year or two further, and recounts one or two more campaigns and intrigues. And, after all, it is not *certainty* we have—for certainty, we are told, is recorded only in heaven—it is not the absolute truth, it is merely a most ingenious mosaic, pieced together out of chance remnants of paper, themselves, alas! too often the record of ignorance, mendacity, and gossip!

Freeman was perfectly aware of all this, and in his own histories he professes to be on his guard to test not only (1) what is written, but (2) who wrote it, and (3) what did the writer know himself? He often failed, it is true, to reach the truth. But the enormous detail which Freeman felt it a point of conscience to impose on his readers led him into a kindred fault. He thought that he himself knew everything that could be known of his subject. He took care to prove this to his reader; but, furthermore, he determined that the reader himself should know everything that could be known. Now the unhappy reader, unless he were an examiner or an examinee, too often sank under the ordeal. This is the age of Photography, minutest Realism, of fissiparous Specialism, of the Infinitesimal. And our histories have to be constructed on the methods of a German savant hunting for microbes with a microscope. For purposes of investigation this is invaluable, and has given us memorable triumphs

of research. But to impart history to the public, a totally different process is required. There, what is wanted is grouping, condensation, synthetic composition—a lifelike picture, not a photographic negative. And the historian who loads his massive volumes with all the smallest details which his instruments reveal, commits the same fault as the painter who, in the early days of Pre-Rafaelitism, was said to have filled his canvas with some millions of strokes, when the eye of the beholder could barely grasp more than a few hundred at sight.

It must be confessed that the great *History of the Norman Conquest*, with its five volumes, 3700 pages, and Index volume, and *William Rufus*, with its two volumes and 1356 pages, make a work which by its bulk is beyond the powers of the general public to master. It is the history of one people—a very great people—at a very important crisis; but at best it deals with one corner of Europe, and covers (after the sketch in the first volume) hardly more than half a century. At this rate, a hundred volumes would hardly contain the annals of our own country; and five or six hundred volumes would hardly suffice for the history of the European nations since their incorporation with Rome. And even then, there would remain a collection, hardly less ample, for the ages that preceded the Roman Empire, and for all the races of Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and America. The vision of a thousand volumes of seven hundred pages each rather daunts the reader, however anxious to study the past. 'What is that to me?' cries the learned historian. 'This is my period, to which I have devoted my life.' The world, however, is not as fond of 'periods' as a school-teacher and a college tutor.

Ours is the age of examinations. To-day, the world naturally divides itself into examiners and examinees. And the system of 'Periods' and of minute Realism is the very life-blood of examining. What our grandfathers used to call Polite Literature is dominated by the examination mania. And books are tested, precisely like an undergraduate's paper-work, by the subtraction of 'marks'; and for 'marks' nothing counts but blunders and omissions. The three-button mandarins who control the higher education of our time are reducing the whole intellectual life of our age to a uniform scheme of Class, Pass, and Pluck, which requires little thought and a great deal of blue pencil. If Gibbon were to be writing now, his work would be pronounced to be 'meagre,' 'sketchy,' and 'viewy'; and as he could show no acquaintance with Hopf and Von Maurer, he would be marked down as a third-class historian. The examination *virus* is eating away the very brain-fibre of our age—just as it has done in China. And these monumental triumphs of infinitesimal realism in narrow 'periods' are at once the product of examination and the *nidus* wherein its poison germinates.

To the student of English history, Freeman's *History of the Norman Conquest* will always remain invaluable —a repertory of learned research, a monument of enlightened judgment, a manual of the evolution of the English race. By precept and example the scholar learns from it how to weigh and compare authorities, and how to marshal his historical evidence. The first volume (published in 1867) deals with some five or six centuries in as many hundred pages. It is the introduction and summary, and therefore is in many ways the most successful. It is true that it consists rather

of a series of essays than of continuous narrative. But the whole work is in some sense a series of essays ; for the enormous bulk of the text and notes, the avalanche of facts and discussions which pour forth on the reader, seriously impair the sense of continuous narrative of the Norman Conquest, from which the attention is distracted by incidental lucubrations and interminable prolixity.

The second volume deals with the reign of the Confessor (less than twenty-four years) in 651 pages. The third volume, with 768 pages, deals only with the year 1066. In this volume the expedition of William fills about 150 pages, the great battle of Hastings occupying about 50 pages. The fourth volume, dealing with the reign of the Conqueror in England (1066-1087), occupies 724 pages. The fifth volume, with its Illustrations and Reflections on the Conquest, fills 901 pages. The appendices alone of the five volumes, with a long array of learned and valuable essays on special points in the history, fill 700 pages, and are (for the student and examinee) not the least important part of the whole work. The index, a monument of diligence and precision, occupies a sixth volume. And then follow two volumes on the short reign of William Rufus. This is a magnificent scale on which to narrate the history of our country down to the end of the eleventh century.

The student of history, the learned scholar, takes in every word of this mass of learning and wise judgment, and finds it a perfect encyclopædia for the eleventh century in England. But the whole of it seldom reaches others than trained scholars, yet most certainly it was not written exclusively for them. It lacks the continuity, the directness, and narrative movement of

a great history. The expedition of William, the invasion of Tostig and Harold Hardrada, the campaigns of Stamford Bridge and Hastings, are all told with the enthusiasm of a stout English spirit and the learning of a Gibbon and a Macaulay. But, alas! they lack the literary magic of Gibbon or Macaulay. In the heat of battle we are pulled up to discuss the relative weight of authorities, whether Harold was fully entrenched, the arguments for and against a particular form of weapon, and many subtle points of topographical precision. It is not thus that the average reader of history cares to have the story of a great battle told him. He has no taste for learned appendices about local topography—hardly intelligible away from the spot. And the result is that this great work of English history, which stands in the front rank to the serious scholar, has not a tenth part of the readers of far inferior works.

The life work of Professor Freeman is as yet the most memorable type of that which is the peculiar note of our age, the minute subdivision of history into special periods and the multiplication of petty detail. There is no evil, of course, in accurate knowledge of real things—no evil, but good. And the more sound research we can have the better, provided we know how to use it with sense. The evil comes in when research into myriads of special periods, topics, institutions, is mistaken for history, supersedes history, chokes off serious history. That is our danger. The dominant authority over human action vested in history in its higher sense, the unity of history, the moral and social meaning of history, as the indispensable basis of social philosophy, this, in the words of Comte quoted by the professor of history at Cambridge, is the intel-

lectual feature of our age: it has been insisted on here by Thomas Arnold, by Freeman, by Stubbs, by Bryce, by Seeley, by Lecky, by John Morley, and Lord Acton. Of all these, Freeman has embodied this truth in the most ample language and with the most passionate conviction. The pity is, that his great works have had indirectly a somewhat contrary effect.

'The history of man is one in all ages,' says Freeman. We must look at history 'as one unbroken whole, no part of which can be safely looked at without reference to other parts.' The entire fabric of social science rests on that dominant doctrine. It cannot be stated more amply and peremptorily than it was stated by Freeman. Was this his own practice: is it the tendency of modern histories? In spite of some fine examples of synthetic history, as Gibbon, as Arnold, as Hallam, Milman, Grote, and Thirlwall understood history, massing the centuries, the nations, the inspiring forces into organic wholes, there can be no doubt that our analytic and microbic research immensely overshadows our co-ordinating activity. And the more ardent adepts of special research are telling us now to leave all attempts at reconstructive history, at the synthetic biography of men and nations, until every muniment pile in Europe, Asia, or Africa shall be definitely calendared, and every individual fact about the Past shall be exactly interpreted, edited, and given to the world.

It is a specious, but vain delusion. As well might men have said: 'Do not attempt to construct a theory of the solar system, until every speck of light discoverable by the most powerful telescope has been locally determined, and its conceivable variations compared at least over a thousand years!' Men might have said:

'Attempt no organic biology, until every germ, microbe, and fibre in every living being has been studied in fifty million monographs!' This is not science; it is pedantry. The recoverable facts of the Past are not less numerous than the specks of light in the Milky Way, and not one out of any million is more important to human life. The real problem for man is to discover that one out of any million which is important—and this is what no industry can do without brains, without scientific and philosophic power. The tendency of modern palæographic research is to multiply monographs, from which scientific co-ordination and philosophic synthesis shall be eliminated as if it were an irritant poison.

The grounds on which this mania for palæographic research threatens mischief are numerous, and each of them is simply decisive. The discoverable facts, or rather statements, are literally infinite. They are growing hour by hour at a ratio far greater than any waste. To adjourn rational co-ordination of these infinite facts (or statements) till they are all registered is to adjourn it indefinitely. In the next place, quite a thousandth part of these facts are perfectly valueless, and can do nothing but burden the memory and obfuscate thought. The most powerful genius could do nothing with limitless materials; nor could Charles Darwin have worked out his thoughts had he been compelled to study every specimen collected in every museum or cabinet in Europe, and to read through every monograph turned out in the present century. In the next place, the blind and unintelligent study of facts, merely as facts, deadens the sense of proportion and relative value both for student and reader, and causes both to attach abnormal importance to the

most paltry discovery, which acquires a fictitious value simply because it was difficult. And, finally, the so-called facts of history are not scientifically demonstrable at all, but at best are little but high probabilities. The physical sciences have a number of resources which are closed to the historian, who cannot experiment, isolate, or cultivate his microbes, but can only trust the antique reports of ignorant, prejudiced, and careless scribes. We can be certain only of the broader facts of the historical record. Doubt increases, for the most part, in direct ratio with the minuteness of the special detail. We may rest assured that Julius Cæsar defeated Pompeius and was killed by Brutus and Cassius. Whole lives might be wasted in vain in seeking to prove what were his last words, and what passed between him and Cleopatra. History, in its worthy sense, is the main *organon* of social philosophy. To fulfil its high task, it must be organic and inspired with synthetic philosophy. To degrade history to the tabulating of interminable trivialities is to return to the literary pedantry of the copious but mindless tedium of the Byzantine annalists.

Yet, if Freeman were not a philosophic historian, not even a great historian at all, he was a noble inspirer of historical enthusiasm. For all his dogmatism, he was no pedant; in spite of prejudice, he had a passionate devotion to historical truth. His vast industry, his marvellous memory, his devotion to his high calling through a life of labour and singleness of purpose, will long secure him an honourable place amongst the teachers of our age. He was no mere specialist, no simple archæologist, no cold-blooded scholar. His studies ranged over broad epochs of ancient as well as modern history—over ethnology

geography, philology, palæology, and architecture, as well as history and politics proper. To them all he brought the truly historic mind—which is the mind of profound sympathy with the great deeds and passionate hopes of Man in the Past.

CHAPTER XIV

JOHN STUART MILL

ALMOST a generation has passed since a most strenuous and magnanimous spirit was laid to rest in the cemetery of Avignon along the Rhone. In that majestic and melancholy spot, beneath dark pines and beside his beloved wife, lies John Stuart Mill, one of the most intense workers, one of the most upright spirits of our age. The age itself, we must admit, has been flowing on, like the Rhone to the sea, and has left the philosopher at peace in his distant grave. His work was completed, he himself said with his dying breath; and his most devoted friends will not dare to claim for him the influence and the reputation he undoubtedly possessed some thirty years ago. There are few to-day who will re-echo quite literally all that John Morley said in the two fine pieces written on the death of Mill in 1873, now to be read in the third volume of his *Miscellanies*. His tribute, if deepened into rare passion and pathos by the unexpected loss of a friend and master, was substantially just and true. He did not say too much when he wrote: 'A strong and pure light is gone out, the radiance of a clear vision and a beneficent purpose.' 'We have lost a great teacher and example of knowledge and virtue.'

It is, however, obvious that the influence of John Stuart Mill has been waning in the present generation

They who would use the language just cited are not so many as they were, nor are they themselves in so strong a force. It was said at the time of his death that with the reputation of Mill would stand or fall the reputation of a whole generation of Englishmen. Something of that kind has already happened. The young lions of to-day, whether in politics, literature, or philosophy, are very far from caring much for what was said 'by them of old time,' *i.e.* in the early manhood of their own fathers. Their motto is, *ἡμεῖς μὲν πατέρων μέγ' ἀμύμονες εὐχόμεθ' εἶναι.* They are not familiar with the reputations of the last generation, and are apt to wonder how these were made. If the reputation of Mill has waned, the reputation of a whole school of leading minds of his generation has waned also. It was the dominant school of the 'sixties': it is dominant no more.

For this reason it is much to be wished that John Morley would now give us that estimate of Mill which in 1873 he said would one day have to be made, and that *Life* which we have so long awaited. But since he is otherwise employed, a few words may be permitted to tell the younger generation wherein lay the influence over us elders of Mill's character and mind some thirty years ago. For my own part, I can pretend to none of the qualifications which so eminently meet in Mr. Morley. Though I knew Mill in the later years of his life, I could not in any sense lay claim to his intimacy. With very deep respect for him, I was in no way his disciple. My own education, habits, tastes, and temperament were so utterly different from his as to awaken in me the interest of contrast and surprise. I felt, and I still feel, vehement aversion to some of Mill's cherished ideals and doctrines. And so

far from his being my master, he has attacked my own master with unsparing, and I hold unjust, criticism in an important volume. I can, therefore, pretend to no claim to speak of him, except it may be some knowledge of his life, nature, and writings; a deep reverence for his noble qualities; and, I think, a sympathetic, but real, impartiality of mind.

These few pages will, of course, not admit of any proper criticism of Mill's philosophy, social and moral teaching, or his political theories, much less any estimate of his character, example, and life. To attempt such a task would be to compile a treatise on Logic, another on Political Economy, a third on Ethics, a fourth on Politics, to say nothing of Metaphysics, Natural Theology, and Positivism. No such high aim is mine. We shall have this in good time, we all trust, when Unionists and Nationalists, Imperialists and Englishmen shall have lain down together at last. In the meantime, I wish to say a few words (*caret quia vate sacro*) as to the influence of John Stuart Mill upon his own generation: what of it is left and is destined to remain—what of it lies silent beneath the pine-trees and cypresses at Avignon—into what form some of the best of it has matured.

Those who are familiar with the sermon on the death of Mill I have cited, will remember how deeply it is charged with enthusiasm for the character of the man, more than with praise of the work of the teacher. It is, perhaps, not easy for those who did not personally know him to do justice to all that was great and good in Mill's nature. By education and by temperament alike he was one of the most reserved and self-contained of men, formally and externally not very sympathetic, a Stoic by birth and training, cramped from childhood

by an unnatural and almost inhuman type of discipline, a man to whom the ordinary amusements, humours, and passions of life were as utterly unknown as were its follies and its vices. His punctilious courtesy was such as to seem somewhat pedagogic to the ordinary man of the world; as his generosity was so methodically rational as to seem almost ungracious to the idle good fellow. Infinitely patient, just, tolerant as he was, he was always dominated by the desire to strike the balance of right and wrong, of the weight of evidence, the force of argument, *pro* and *contra* every act under observation and every proposition that he heard. This produced on the ordinary and casual observer an impression of pedantic formalism most undeserved by a nature that was the very soul of compassion, benevolence, and honour. As his books are curiously devoid of anything like literary grace or mastery of the 'pathetic fallacy,' the ordinary reader does not easily perceive how much enthusiasm, what magnanimity, what tenderness underlies the precise statements even of such pieces as the *Autobiography*, the *Subjection of Women*, and *Liberty*: pieces which are red-hot within with affection, pity, and passion. Some of us were always more attracted by Mill's character than by his intellect: we rated his heart above his brain; and his failures seem to us mental, not moral perversities. But of his fine and exemplary nature it is indeed needless for me to speak. It has had full justice done to it by John Morley, who has so well placed Mill's distinction in the 'union of stern science with infinite aspiration, of rigorous sense of what is real and practicable with bright and luminous hope.' We listened to him just because we found in him a most systematic intellect in a truly great heart.

It must always be borne in mind that Mill essentially belonged to a school, that he was peculiarly the product of a very marked order of English thinkers, and gave their ideas a new development. Coleridge, Carlyle, Ruskin can hardly be said to have been either the sons or the founders of any school of thought. John Mill was a singularly systematic product of a singularly systematic school of philosophers. And he was himself at one time the recognised head of a group of men of a more or less kindred type, with more or less similar aims in mental and social science. Locke, Hume, Adam Smith, Bentham, Malthus, James Mill, Austin, Grote, Bowring, Roebuck, the philosophic Radicals of the first Reform era, maintained a real filiation of central ideas, which reached their complete general systematisation in the earlier writings of John Stuart Mill. He in turn worked on general lines with Professor Bain, T. Hare, G. H. Lewes, Professor Cairnes, W. E. Forster, and Henry Fawcett. John Morley and Leonard Courtney still maintain erect the standard of their former chief. And Herbert Spencer, building on an analogous general ground-plan, has raised a still more encyclopædic system of his own.

John Morley hardly over-stated the intellectual authority of Mill when he wrote, in 1873, that the leading men of that day bore traces of his influence, whether as disciples or as opponents. The universities (he said), journalism, popular reading, and foreign opinion concurred in the same testimony. Mill held, moreover, a very unusual position—at once head of a school of philosophy, and also a most active social reformer, a politician of mark, and the inspirer of many practical movements, moral, economic, or religious. Hume, Adam Smith, Carlyle, Spencer have each

poured forth very pregnant ideas upon social problems; but they did not discuss Bills in Parliament, or found Leagues. It was the essence of John Stuart Mill, which he inherited with his Benthamite blood and his Utilitarian nurture, to unite 'stern science with infinite aspiration,' to regard social philosophy as the instrument of social regeneration. If he were far more the philosopher than Bentham, he was quite as much as Bentham the social reformer—far more than was any other follower of Bentham and his school. Mill indeed was a compound of Bentham corrected by the ideals and thinkers of modern France, especially by Auguste Comte.

Those who admit that the influence of Mill has been waning in the last generation, have also to admit that the whole school of thought which came to its flower in Mill has been waning also in the same time and for the same cause. John Mill is not to-day what he was a generation ago, because Utilitarianism, Benthamism, Political Economy, Radicalism, the philosophy of experience, moral and social Utopias have somewhat gone out of fashion. It is rather the school than the man which has lost vogue. It is not so much Mill as social science which ceases to absorb the best of the rising generation. We live in an age of reversion to more early types—theologico-metaphysico-dilemmas and aristocratic incarnations of the beautiful, the wise, and the good. To-day our aspirations are imperial, our *summum bonum* is national glory. War, armaments, athletic triumphs fill the souls of our patriotic and heroic youth. Philosophy retires into a higher region of mist and invisibility. Philosophy must wait and possess its soul in peace.

If the larger doctrinal treatises of Mill have a wider

teaching power, his distinctive ideas and the keynote of his mind and nature are to be found rather in the three short popular essays to which he gave his whole soul in later life, and whereon he placed his chief claim to leadership. These are *Liberty* (1859), *Utilitarianism* (1863), and *The Subjection of Women* (1869). They are all summaries of his beliefs, manifestoes, appeals, almost sermons in their inward fervour, addressed to the people, condensed and published in sternly popular form. To reach the essence of Mill's nature and influence, we must always go straight to these short but typical works of his mellow and widowed age.

The literary history of the *Liberty* has no small interest. It was planned and written as an essay in 1855; in the following year, he tells us that, whilst mounting the steps of the Capitol at Rome, he conceived (like Gibbon) the idea of making it a book. For two years his wife and he worked at it, writing it twice over, and then revising every sentence separately and criticising it with their joint labour. After years of thought, it is published with a magnificent dedication to his dead wife as part author of the work, inspired 'by her all but unrivalled wisdom.' And it may be bought, in sixty-eight pages, for sixteenpence, in which form it has found an immense circulation. None of his writings, he says, have been so carefully composed or so sedulously corrected; and he believes it destined to survive longer than anything else that he has written, with the possible exception of the *Logic*. It is destined to be, in his own words, 'a philosophic textbook of a single truth'—'the importance, to man and society, of a large variety in types of character, and of giving full freedom to human nature to expand itself in innumerable and conflicting

directions.' But this 'single truth' covers the whole field of the relation of the individual to society, *i.e.* Ethics, Sociology, Education, Politics, Law, Manners, and Religion. It was, therefore, not strange that a code of maxims thereon should absorb the thoughts of two thinkers for many years, and, when formulated with a sort of stern passion, should strike fire in some millions of brains.

The 'simple principle' on which the *Liberty* expends so deep a passion and so much logic is this: that self-protection is the sole end for which society is warranted in interfering with the liberty of action of the individual. This principle is *absolute*, and includes all intervention, physical force, or moral coercion. The independence of the individual is absolute, of right, implies the sovereignty of the individual over his own mind and body. The only part of his conduct for which he is amenable to society is that which concerns others. And this liberty includes liberty of conscience, liberty of tastes and pursuits, liberty of combination. No society can be called free in which freedom in all these forms does not exist, absolute and unqualified. On this great theme John Mill has composed a truly monumental manual of acute and impressive thoughts.

It would be futile to attempt in these few pages either a defence or a criticism of these far-reaching dogmas. The only purpose of this slight essay is to consider how far the book of Mill impressed his own age, and how far it can be said to have a growing or permanent influence. It is certain that the little book produced a profound impression on contemporary thought, and had an extraordinary success with the public. It has been read by hundreds of thousands, and, to some of the most vigorous and most con-

scientious spirits amongst us, it became a sort of gospel—much as for a time did Rousseau's *Social Contract* or Bentham's *Principles of Legislation*. It was the code of many thoughtful writers and several influential politicians. It undoubtedly contributed to the practical programmes of Liberals and Radicals for the generation that saw its birth; and the statute book bears many traces of its influence over the sphere and duties of government. But in the present generation, or, broadly speaking, since the great Franco-German war, that influence has been waning, and is now at its lowest point. The book is still read, it is still admired, it has not been refuted or superseded. But much of it is accepted to-day as truth needing no argument; much of it is regarded as quite outside of modern conditions; and a good deal of it is condemned as contrary to all the movements and aspirations of the newer schools of social reform. Why is this? and what are the parts of the book to which these remarks may apply?

The second chapter, on 'Liberty of Thought and Discussion,' is a masterpiece of wise and generous pleading for toleration in opinion, freedom of speech, and liberty of conscience. On such a topic it is impossible to be original; but it condenses, with a mastery of touch and a measured passion, all the best that has ever been said in defence of freedom of opinion, and will stand beside the *Areopagitica* as one of the classics thereon. Few of us are still so much in love with Debate as to share in Mill's exaggeration of the moral and mental value of discussion itself, so that he seems to think that Truth must languish if it were not constantly opposed to the counter-stimulation of some *advocatus Falsi*. But Mill would not be him-

self if he did not exaggerate the value of discussion. Yet the argument is lighted up with so much moral enthusiasm, and (what is so rare in Mill) with so much eloquence, that we easily pass over its defects. This chapter also has that typical example of free speech in the concrete — the daring and somewhat unjust arraignment of Christian morality. But even those who are forced to dissent from many of its arguments and conclusions will agree with Professor Bain that 'it stands as the chief textbook on freedom of discussion.'

The third chapter is an ardent plea for *individuality* as an element of well-being, and it is that part of the book which makes it a sort of gospel to many a brave and honest soul. No one can gainsay the manly enthusiasm and convincing logic which rings in every passage. No one outside a Jesuit seminary is ever heard to maintain the contrary; but the eloquent and reasoned justification of individuality as the essential basis of civilisation does certainly give a moral stamina to life, and many a man will echo Charles Kingsley's words, that it made him 'a clearer-headed, braver-minded man on the spot.' The question still remains, whether there has been visible of late any waning of individuality in our country or in Europe: is there any real danger of its being undervalued? Is it true that 'the danger which threatens human nature is *the deficiency of personal impulses and preferences*'? There are undoubtedly many molluscous and sheepish natures which show such deficiency. There always have been, and there always will be; and if anything can make men of them, such a warning as that of Mill on *Liberty* ought to rouse them. But a cool review of the facts, after the forty years that have passed since this appal-

ling prophecy was made, compels us to doubt if any such danger now 'threatens human nature'—to doubt if the last generation showed any want of 'individuality'—if 'individuality' has been growing weaker amongst us in the present generation. A very strong and growing opinion to-day is that we are still rather over-stocked with 'the sovereignty of the individual.'

It is when we come to the fourth chapter—'The Limits of the Authority of Society over the Individual'—that the breach grows widest between Mill's absolute individualism and the current of contemporary thought. The steady tendency of opinion and of policy in the last generation has been to strengthen the authority of society over individuals. Though it is only a jest to say that 'we are all Socialists now,' it is quite true that recent opinion and legislation have shown evidence of a socialist bias. Mill laid it down as an axiom, 'that society has now got the better of the individual.' But the dominant, and I will add the best, ideals of our time tend still further to assist society in getting the better of the individual. Indeed, the book on *Liberty*, so far from helping to curb the authority of society and limit its range, coincided with a very strong heave throughout the whole of society, from top to bottom, to make the authority of society more stringent and more ample. The old legal saw ran, 'It is the part of a good judge to enlarge his jurisdiction.' The political maxim to-day more nearly runs thus: 'It is the part of the wise legislator to enlarge the authority of law.' And whatever be the errors of detail, most thoughtful and patriotic citizens are not dissatisfied with the general spirit of the rule.

It does not at all follow that Mill's protests in the central chapter of his book are unnecessary or mis-

chievous. His general propositions are far too absolute and doctrinaire; but his practical warnings are invaluable, and his concrete examples of state meddling and muddling are full of sense and point. Thousands of social reformers and scores of politicians are every day clamouring amongst us for repressive legislation, of which Mill expounds all the folly and mischief. Nearly all the examples he gives in the chapter on the 'Limits of Authority' and in the chapter on 'Applications' may be gratefully accepted as contributions to political philosophy, by those who very much object to Mill's general doctrines of non-intervention by society as absolute and rigid axioms. Even they must see how many things are wise, how many are noble, how many are inspiring in this memorable and sagacious book.

The real weakness of the book, the cause of the aversion it inspires in so many minds, lies in its ultra-absolute dogmatism and its violent exaggeration of individualism. Mill's canons as to state intervention are stated with the rigid generality of mathematical axioms. His propositions bristle with such words as 'absolute,' 'unqualified,' 'of right,' 'sovereignty,' 'independence.' Now, the science of politics abhors any 'absolute,' 'unqualified' rule: it uses 'right,' 'sovereignty,' 'independence' only in a legal or else in a metaphorical way, never as constituting a rigid social law. Mill is far too deeply versed in the history of sociology and jurisprudence to appeal to 'rights' with the reckless sophistry of so many metaphysicians. But when he speaks of a thing as 'not warranted,' as being 'of right,' or 'not rightfully,' he is appealing to a theory of right. But we know now that sound principles of social organisation cannot be founded upon 'rights' exclusively. 'Rights' are primarily what the law will

secure for each, and secondarily, what each may think himself worthy to receive—an idea on which no doctrine can be framed. At bottom, the book on *Liberty* is an attempt to ascertain what are the 'rights' of the individual against the state. We know that this is like asking what are the 'rights' of the stomach against the body?

An even more fundamental fallacy is the way in which 'society' and 'the state' are used almost as if they were interchangeable terms; and there is a want of steady distinguishing between these two throughout the argument. The true problem is, not 'what are the limits of the authority of society over the individual?' but 'what are the respective limits of state legislation and social opinion?' The essence of social science is to determine the respective provinces of law, force, government on the one side, and of public opinion, social morality, religious discipline on the other side. The progress of civilisation means the restriction of the former power, and the correlative enlargement of the latter power: the transfer of control over individuals from law to opinion. As the poet says—

'Molto è licito là che qui non lece.'

Most thoughtful men agree with the practical examples that Mill gives us of the evils of legislative meddling. But they are not at all willing to bind the legislative power within absolute and cast-iron bonds. There are no absolute and immutable limits: it is a practical problem, to be determined for different societies and various occasions in tentative ways, by skilled statesmen, as Aristotle says, ὡς ἂν ὁ φρόνιμος ὁρίσειεν.

Most of us to-day deeply revolt against the arbitrary

dogma—that the only part of conduct for which one is amenable to society is that which concerns others; that as to what concerns oneself, the individual is sovereign. That may be the practical limit of legislation, but it is no absolute bar to moral and social influence. If a man chooses to be a sot, a hog, a savage, a catamite, it is the bounden duty of his fellow-men to bring the whole pressure of society to bear on him; of *society*, we say, not necessarily of *law*: that is a question for experts, or statesmen. What 'part of conduct' concerns the individual merely and does not concern others? No part whatever. 'Conduct' is *ex hypothesi* a social act. No man's life is, or can be, solitary. The whole of 'conduct' concerns society, concerns others; for human life simply means a continual action upon, and reaction from, our fellow-beings. 'We are all members one of another,' said the greatest of religious teachers. And the strength of all religions has lain in their bringing home to the believer the continuous and inevitable relation of every act and thought of the individual soul to the great Power which he believes to represent the sum of things and men around him. Nor can any gospel look to supersede the old gospels of theology, unless it will base itself on the organic unity of the individual and of humanity, and discard vain dreams about the isolated autonomy of the *auto-man*.

What does 'the individual' mean? It is no doubt a physical, mechanical, and biological fact. It is a convenient term of logic, and is useful as an abstract idea for purposes of analysis or classification. But in sociology there never was, is not, nor can be, any absolute 'individual' in real life, as a normal human being living a complete and continuous human life.

In social science, an 'individual' is a term of art, not a substantive organism, just as we may speak of the 'nervous system,' or 'the digestive apparatus' in anatomy, or the 'vertebrate series' in physiology. We cannot find, or even imagine, any 'nervous system,' or 'digestive apparatus,' living and continuously in function in a normal way, whilst being absolutely isolated from the rest of the organism, 'sovereign over itself,' and rigidly absorbed in what 'merely concerns itself.' So, in social science, we cannot find, we cannot imagine, an 'individual' living a complete and continuous human life, as an individual. Living men and women are, and always must be, organic members of a social system. Any social philosophy founded upon 'individuals' as such, is founded not on real facts and living beings, as we find them and know them, but upon mental abstractions, that is, upon postulates, not on realities. Of course we can temporarily get individuals isolated, just as we can dissect out a nerve, or even a cell, but these isolated individuals can no more function normally as men and women than can the dissected nerve or cell.

To talk, in social science, about the 'rights of individuals,' or the separate life of individuals, or the independence of individuals, or the conduct that solely concerns the individual, unless we are using these terms as convenient hypotheses of abstract analysis, not as real, permanent, substantive facts of nature, is as incoherent as to talk of 'the rights' of the nervous system, or the separate life of a detached nerve or organ in the dissected body. In social science, the smallest substantive organism of which society is composed is the family, not the individual. A family, as such, has a rudimentary organic life of its own, but

an individual has not. A family on an isolated island can conceivably continue a normal, but very low, type of human life, physical, moral, intellectual, and progressive, and can transmit something that can be called the germs of human civilisation from generation to generation. An individual cannot do this, and therefore is not, normally speaking, *man* at all. The unit of society is the family, not the individual, which is an abstract artifice of analytic classification. And the social science which starts with individuals, not with families, is based on a radical sophism. It is this fundamental error which vitiates Mill's book on *Liberty*, and vitiates indeed the whole scheme of Mill's social philosophy.

In the introduction to the *Liberty*, Mill does make some reference to the difficulty that whatever affects the individual may *indirectly* affect society, and he promises to meet this objection in the sequel. But he entirely fails to meet it, and he states the difficulty itself far too slightly. The attempt to distinguish between conduct which concerns oneself, and conduct that may remotely concern others, is quite fallacious. No distinction can be drawn, for human acts are organically inseparable. Not only *may* the conduct of the individual, as concerns himself, affect others, but it *must* affect them—the individual never can know when, or how, or whom it will affect. The belly might as well say to the brain, 'What can it matter to you what I take?' as the individual can say to his family, or even to his countrymen, 'What can it matter to you what I eat or drink?' Society does not indeed possess the all-seeing Eye which the Christian believes to penetrate the most secret thoughts or acts; but it has quite as real an interest in those thoughts and acts,

and they far more intimately concern its own well-being.

The book on *Liberty*, from beginning to end, is an invaluable textbook for the legislator, for the politician, for the social reformer ; and its powerful protest against all forms of over-legislation, intolerance, and the tyranny of majorities, is rich with perennial wisdom and noble manliness. But as a piece of social philosophy, it is based upon a sophism as radical as that of Rousseau himself, with his assumption of a primordial contract. And if these absolute dogmas as to 'the sovereignty of the individual' against even the moral coercion of his fellow-citizens were literally enforced, there would be put a bar to the moral and religious development of civilised communities. Mill has left it exceedingly vague what is the line that he draws between the 'persuasion,' exhortation, instruction, and apparently even the boycotting, which he admits, and the 'moral coercion of public opinion,' which he regards as iniquitous. As in the famous trades-union cases, it seems to be left to the temper of the judge to decide where 'persuasion' ends and 'moral coercion' begins. The real *crux*, in the problem of individual liberty, as in that of 'picketing,' is to decide where lawful 'persuasion' becomes wrongful 'coercion.' And this part of the problem Mill has left uncertain and vague. To many of us, 'moral coercion,' of a wise and guarded sort, may become a great engine of progressive civilisation.

Not only is the language of the *Liberty* somewhat vague in defining the respective limits of 'persuasion' and 'coercion,' but the practical illustrations of lawful restrictions by the state seem at times hardly consistent with so absolute a doctrine. It is somewhat

startling, after such trenchant assertion of the absolute freedom of the individual, to find a defence of the Malthusian laws of some Continental states, which forbid the marriage of needy adults. The vehement language against the 'mischievous act' of poor persons in breeding sounds strangely in the mouth of an apostle of freedom. And it is even more startling to find it preceded by an elaborate plea for '*the duty of enforcing universal education*,' the instrument being public examinations, extending to all children, and beginning at an early age, the parent being punished if the child fails to pass. Here is indeed a Chinese tyranny of an ominous kind, which is hard to reconcile with the absolute freedom of the citizen. Many of us from the first protested against state compulsion, even in the sacred cause of education, and we see the results of it to-day. *Hinc illæ lacrymæ—illæ iræ—illæ rixæ*—which so long resounded in our midst. The result of forcing children into school, cramming them for mechanical examination, and fining the parent, has proved to be a source of religious bitterness, and the disorganisation of our public education.

The root error of ancient states, according to Mill, was in their belief 'that the State had a deep interest in the whole bodily and mental discipline of every one of its citizens.' It is quite true that the codes of the ancient commonwealths erred in a monstrous amount of over-legislation—*Mulieres genas ne radunto*, XII. Tab.—which culminated in Plato's Utopian Republic. This primitive error Mill would meet by the dogma that the individual, and not the state, is sovereign over all that concerns himself alone. The correction is as sophistical and as mischievous as the original. dogma. The error of the ancient legislators lay in their extravagant

idea of the state. Put the term 'society' for 'state,' and the doctrine is right. Society *has* a deep interest in the whole bodily and mental discipline of every one of its citizens; though it is but a small part of that discipline which the magistrate can enforce or laws prescribe, and but a part of it which even society can influence. How to distinguish the one from the other is the great problem of polity, of ethic, of religion. And that problem Mill has not solved, in spite of all the wise warnings he impresses on the legislator, and all the courageous and inspiring virtue that breathes throughout his essay.

The little treatise on *Utilitarianism* was also a compact manual of Mill's ethical system, elaborated for years and diligently revised. It was begun in 1854, recast and finally published in 1861-63. It contains a wonderful amount of thought; it has had a great influence; and has met with incessant criticism and comment. It remains, after all deductions and corrections made, far the most ample and rational text-book of the principle of Greatest Happiness as the foundation of ethic. It is better reasoned, more fully developed, more enlightening and ennobling than anything produced by Bentham and his school. If it had been wholly detached from the formulas and associations of Bentham, if its type of social morality had been worked out in ampler forms and made its central doctrine, if it had been more purely Mill's own work and if he had gone on to define and expound his own doctrine of Happiness — perhaps, if it had borne another title—it would have been the most important and effective piece that Mill ever produced.

The worst thing about it is its name — the term which Mill himself adopted in order to describe the

Benthamite principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. In spite of all that Bentham, Mill, and their followers have said, the ordinary man will continue perversely to associate *Utility* with *Expediency*, with self-interest, with material value, with practical commodities. It is ignorant, unfair, uncandid to do so—but it is human nature. It must be admitted that *Utilitarianism* is a very awkward term to describe the pursuit of the highest welfare of mankind; to mean indeed what has been happily called—The Service of Man; and to include all the devotion of self to others that we may find in the lives of Alfred, or Washington—nay, we must add, of Socrates, St. Paul, or Christ. Are these the true types of utilitarian morality?

In substance, Mill's book is a plea for ethic as being a demonstrable science founded on analysis and experience of man as a social being eminently adapted to social development. When he says that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, and that by happiness he means pleasure, he makes it clear in the sequel that he really intends to say that happiness, in the best sense, is the general and purest welfare of mankind, and that pleasure, in the true and highest degree, is the satisfaction of man's best instincts of benevolence and devotion. So understood, the book is a solid and convincing addition to moral philosophy, in spite of its title and its associations.

The weakness of the argument admittedly lies in the want of a more scientific definition of happiness, and of an ample exposition of the elements, constitution, and production of happiness. And an even more serious *hiatus* lies in the absence of all these explanations as to pleasure. What constitutes happiness: how is it created, maintained, and lost? What plea-

sures are high, what low: what are the qualities of pleasure, and how should we distinguish between them? It is quite clear that Mill's own conception of happiness is both practical and elevated, reasonably adjusted between *each* and *all*; and that his conception of pleasure is a wise and noble harmony between the personal and the altruistic pleasures. But he does not systematically work all this out. He leaves all this in sketch. And he does not, therefore, give us a substantive scheme of ethical science.

That Mill's conception of happiness and of pleasure is of this rational and elevated order appears in his whole argument, but especially in that truly grand passage in the third chapter, where he claims as the natural basis of morality the social feelings of mankind, the desire to be in unity with our fellow-creatures; and where he goes on to show that the social state is the normal destiny, and, under civilisation, becomes the instinctive habit of mankind. The true basis of ethic is that which, with Aristotle, starts with the conception of happiness as normally to be attained by the free development of man's natural function, and man's natural function to be fulfilling his part as a social being. And Comte has completed that view by proving man's natural function to be the systematic control of the personal desires by the benevolent instincts, with regard to and by the aid of the entire human organism. Mill coincides with that theory, and is entirely saturated with it; he certainly urges nothing to the contrary. But he has not worked out any theory of ethic so definitely as Comte has done, and indeed as Herbert Spencer has done.

How Mill himself reconciled the tone of militant individualism in the *Liberty* with the tone of enthusi-

astic altruism of the *Utilitarianism*, he entirely fails to explain in his *Autobiography*, or elsewhere. The two pieces were both composed about the same period—that of his short married life—and both were published at nearly the same date. He was evidently not conscious of any divergence of view. Without saying that they are in verbal or direct contradiction, or that they do not coincide in many things, the paramount importance given to the social feelings as the firm foundation of morality does not seem compatible with the *spirit* of the *Liberty*, which is to assert the sovereignty of the individual and the absolute independence of each man and woman. Take this noble passage in the third chapter of the *Utilitarianism*—

'The social state is at once so natural, so necessary, and so habitual to man, that, except in some unusual circumstances or by *an effort of voluntary abstraction*, he never conceives himself otherwise than as a member of a body; and this association is riveted more and more, as mankind are farther removed from the state of savage independence. Any condition, therefore, which is essential to a state of society, becomes more and more an inseparable part of every person's conception of the state of things which he is born into, and which is the destiny of a human being. . . .

. . . . . .

'In an improving state of the human mind, the influences are constantly on the increase, which tend to generate in each individual a feeling of unity with all the rest; *which feeling, if perfect, would make him never think of, or desire, any beneficial condition for himself, in the benefits of which they are not included.*'

This fine burst of altruistic sentiment is as true as it is eloquent. It is entirely consistent with Mill's own nature and with the facts of his life, and it inspires the

whole spirit of his *Utilitarianism*, of which it is the best and central idea. A follower of Comte would even say that the altruism is exaggerated in the last cited phrase, and that the legitimate claims of self are ignored. Mill, we know, called Comte 'a morality-intoxicated man: every question with him is one of morality, and no motive but that of morality is permitted.' *Potest retorqueri*; for here Mill appears as intoxicated—not so much with morality as with altruism. But if this fusion of the personal with the altruistic feelings is so natural, so complete in a high civilisation, so essential to the stability of morality, what becomes of the defiant sovereignty of the individual—'whose independence in all that part of conduct which merely concerns himself is, of right, absolute'? In the *Utilitarianism* we are told that a man of high moral culture in a society of high civilisation will come to feel about himself, to think of himself, not as an isolated individual, but habitually and naturally as an organ in a social organism. How are we to reconcile the *Liberty* of Mill with his *Utilitarianism*?

I turn now to the last of his completed books, the *Subjection of Women*, 1869—in many ways the most eloquent of his works, the most characteristic, and perhaps that which has had the most direct and immediate effect. Like the *Liberty*, it was written many years before it was published, and was to a great degree a joint production. His biographer, Professor Bain, very justly calls it 'the most sustained exposition of Mill's lifelong theme—the abuses of power.' And Mr. John Morley calls it 'the best illustration of all the best and richest qualities of its author's mind.' 'It is fortunate,' he adds, 'that a subject of such incom-

parable importance should have been first effectively presented for discussion in so worthy and pregnant a form.'

The form is indeed pregnant, and in every sense worthy of a scheme which touches us all home, and reaches so far and wide. It is one of those very rare examples of a short treatise on a weighty topic, packed with accumulated thought, and fused with ardent conviction. In four short chapters it condenses a scheme of social ethic. It is in its passionate logic the most 'notable result of this ripest, loftiest, most inspiring part of his life.' And its practical effect on legislation, manners, and opinion has no doubt been greater than anything else which Mill gave to his generation. The law has already been amended on many points which drew down his indignation and satire. A great number of the disabilities of women arising from prejudice, habit, or torpor have been practically removed. At least, there remains no legal or moral bar to the aspiring woman, except in one or two exceptional cases. Literature, art, medicine, science, law, the universities, athletics, sport, political agitation, the public service, are now practically open to women. Their admission to Parliament, to the Franchise, to the Bar, to Degrees, is still an open question, which would be decided in their favour at once if the majority of women seriously resolved to claim it. There is nothing now to prevent any woman who wishes it from competing with men in composing an epic, playing in a polo match, orating on platforms, in building a cathedral, in presiding over a hospital, in inspecting a factory, or sitting on a parish council and a school board. One or two disabilities remain, really because many of the best and greatest women we have earnestly

oppose their removal. The change which the present generation has witnessed in law, practice, and in opinion is mainly due to the passionate school of reform which Mill inspired, and very largely to the little book in which his aspirations were concentrated.

This is no place to discuss how far these changes are salutary, for the aim of this brief essay is to call attention to the effect of Mill's influence on his age. It is impossible to dispute what Mr. Morley justly calls 'the sagacity of his maxims on individual conduct and character,' and 'the beauty of the aspirations for collective social life' in this eloquent treatise. There are whole pages which would furnish forth a dozen sermons on the coarseness, the cruelty, the arrogance which men so often show towards women who fall into their power, towards the women of their own family—to their sisters, to their daughters, constantly to their wives, and occasionally even to their mothers. It is a scathing indictment: and few men will dare to say that they have not known some loathsome examples of the brutalities it depicts. And all honest men will agree that there are few homes into which this insolence of sex does not from time to time intrude; that the rebuking of this temper is indeed a primal duty of morality and religion; that no more powerful sermon on this duty has ever been preached by man.

The *Subjection of Women*, however, is not a simple sermon against male arrogance. It is a systematic effort to recast the whole form of our domestic, social, and political life, and as such it must be judged. The real question is not whether the book contains many salutary warnings and some noble aspirations, but whether it shows adequate ground for a vast

revolution in law, opinion, habits, and ideals, both of private and of public life. Has civilised life between the sexes been based on a selfish tyranny: must it be reformed root and branch? Here some of those who honour most the memory of Mill entirely decline to assent. That he has denounced with a noble freedom gross tendencies in our social and domestic life is most true. That these tendencies are so enormous, so universal, so poisonous as he asserts is a monstrous exaggeration. That they can only be overcome by the tremendous revolution which he preaches is an even more dangerous delusion. The subjection of women is a mere hysterical sophism in itself. The remedy proposed to cure it is rank moral and social anarchy.

The whole argument is an example of what we know so well—the fiery denunciation of some too common failing or vice, to be stamped out by some revolutionary process. Nearly all that teetotallers say about drunkenness is true; but it does not follow that we need penal laws to prevent all mankind from obtaining alcohol. Marriage is not seldom a cruel purgatory for one or both of the married pair; but it does not follow that all marriages should be terminable at will or on trivial grounds. There is practised a great deal of cruelty to brutes and much wanton slaughter; but it does not follow that we ought to make it a misdemeanour to hurt or kill a vertebrate animal, even in order to save human life or provide human food. Calmly judged, and regarded as a serious contribution to sociology, the *Subjection of Women* partakes of the fanatical extravagance found in Abolitionists, Vegetarians, and Free Lovers. The assertions of fact on which it professes to rest its plea are caricatures

of practical life of truly grotesque extravagance. And the results at which it aims would logically involve the dissolution of civil and domestic existence as civilisation has slowly evolved it.

It is said to be a 'joint production'; but in truth the *Subjection of Women* is much more the production of a woman than of a man. Mill himself was a man with a heart of truly feminine sensibility. His heart was even richer than his brain. Under the stimulus of indignation for the outrages and obstacles of which he saw women to be frequent victims, his acute reasoning powers caught fire. Indeed, there are purple patches in the book where we seem to hear that spiteful wrong-headedness of some woman who has grown old in nursing her wrongs, out of touch with actual life and with her own sex. These Hecubas, whose married life was a failure or who have never known marriage at all, are suffered to rail at male wickedness with a burlesque exaggeration which disturbs no one, and which none disregard so completely as the sensible, amiable, average woman. We had hardly got over the conventional satire upon Woman which disgraced the age of Swift, Pope, and Congreve, when there was founded the feminine caricature of Man. And for this new terror to quiet life Mr. Mill, with his female inspirers and imitators, have to answer at the bar of Good Sense and Good Feeling.

A revolution so vast as that involving the mutual relations of the sexes is not to be decided by reference to one country or one generation. The supposed uprising of women against the tyranny of man is still a mere fad in the other advanced nations of Europe. And to pretend that women are slaves in the United States is too ludicrous to be attempted. In what is

far the largest part of the English-speaking race, we are assured that Woman is absolute mistress of the situation, and Man with shame begins to take a lower place. The American girls who so freely accept English husbands are not thought by their sisters to descend from queens into the ranks of degraded slaves. The anomalies of the feudal law which long lingered on our statute book, for the most part survivals of antique manners, were in practice corrected by appropriate modifications. It is an instance of this feminine want of balance, of knowledge, and of impartiality, when Mr. Mill calls these modifications of the old law 'special contracts setting aside the law.' The rules of equity and the system of settlement are, of course, quite as truly law as the old Norman common law; and, instead of 'setting aside the law,' they are improvements in law made by lawyers and enforced by judges. It is childish to ask for a change which will shake to its foundations every household in civilisation, on the ground of an obsolete doctrine which survives in the textbooks of our old English law, but which no longer seriously affects any number of families. English law bristles with anomalies under the heads of property, family, Church, and State, and we have a dozen different types of agitation which propose radical changes on the strength of these obsolete and paradoxical anomalies. It is melancholy to find a great sociologist such as Mill heading one more of these rhetorical revolutions.

Let us guard against misconception, if that be possible, on this thorny topic. We admit that many changes are needed in law, in opinion, in our habits, before all the powers of women can be fully developed. There is permanent value in Mill's invectives against

male tyranny in the past and male arrogance in the present. And his impassioned rebukes have much nobility and no little truth. But they do not justify the radical sexual revolution that he heralds. It would be quite as easy to frame a wholesale indictment against the cruelty, selfishness, and meanness of women—not in the brutal ways common to bad men, but in the feline ways common to bad women. There are bad wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, alas! in all ranks, although the bad are not so savage as bad men, and the good women are often nobler than the best men. Men of the world know as many homes made wretched by the defects of the women as by the arrogance of the men. Selfishness, alas! is common to both sexes, and is too often latent, if it be not blatant, in the average home. It takes different forms with men and with women, but there is not so much to choose between the secretive selfishness of women and the domineering selfishness of men. The vices of both are to be met by purer morals, manners, religion—not by social revolutions and anarchic experiments in the New Life. To argue that the arrogance of many men requires us to turn our social institutions inside out is quite as foolish as it would be to argue that the meanness of many women justifies the subjection of women as really practised by ancient Romans and modern Mussulmans.

I have no intention whatever of discussing the specific changes recommended by Mill; and it would be idle in this place to touch upon problems so vast and so universal. The institutions of Family and the relations of the sexes concern the whole human race and the general course of human civilisation. It is pedantry to debate them from the point of view of

Britain to-day. A favourite argument with some academic debaters founds this vast social revolution on the slightly greater proportion of women to men—a phenomenon in itself trifling, which is due to the accidents of emigration in the British Empire for the time, but which is reversed by similar reasons in the United States and some other countries. The famous argument that it is impossible to say what women may one day become, since for generations they have never had a chance, is too much like the pretext of the spiritualists that the presence of an incredulous person makes every test unfair. A whole generation has now been bred up in the light of the new movement that Mill led and inspired; and few of the disabilities he denounced have now any practical effect. It is difficult to believe that, in these thirty years, women have proved themselves so greatly superior to their mothers and their grandmothers, that the passage from slavery to freedom has wrought any change so vast—or indeed any change at all except a certain perceptible loss in tenderness, modesty, and charm, and a very marked increase of restlessness, self-assertion, and conceit.

The specific proposals of the book need not be considered whilst it confronts us with the root misconception on which it is founded. Women are not a subject race in civilised Europe and America, not slaves, not victims; and men are not tyrants, jealous taskmasters, and inhuman brutes. And the plea for the vast social changes involved is founded on the same theory of the individual that is the root error of *Liberty*. Nothing can be made right in sociology whilst society is regarded as made up of individuals instead of families. If this individualist doctrine is logically carried out, and husband and wife are to be

but temporary 'partners' with identical rights and separate lives, monogamic marriage as now understood must disappear. Mill for once failed in his accustomed courage when he shrank from frankly dealing with the problem of Marriage. It is certain that he was really prepared for a very large relaxation of its actual conditions and laws. But Marriage is only one of the institutions over which these absolute dogmas of individualism would cast a blight. The family as an institution would be dissolved; the fine flower of womanhood would become cankered: the brutality of man would become a grim reality; and the Subjection of Women would be a fact—and not an epigram.

With all its defects, the book has great beauties, lasting merits. All that could be done by a most generous, pure, and noble spirit starting with a vicious theory, Mill has done. To me it reads like a sermon of St. Bernard on the miraculous gifts of the saints, or some other transcendental figment. Beautiful and impressive as an occasional homily, as philosophy it is vitiated, not only by its metaphysical apotheosis of the individual, but also by unsound physiological, cerebral, and ethical data. The truth lies not in the *equality* but in the *interdependence* of the sexes: not in their *identities* or *similarities* but in their *heterogeneities* and *correlations*. This truth Mill's own beauty of soul is continually leading him to affirm, even whilst the romance of his personal life is seducing him to adopt most extravagant delusions. The co-operation of man with woman has never been more finely described than in Mill's own statement of the ideal marriage—'in the case of two persons of cultivated faculties, identical in opinions and purposes, between whom there exists that

best kind of equality, similarity of powers and capacities with reciprocal superiority in them—so that each can enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other, and can have alternately the pleasure of leading and of being led in the path of development.' Be it noted that this picture is in the very spirit, nay, in the actual words, with which Comte has drawn the ideal marriage. This ideal is at once the gem of Mill's book on Women—and its refutation. It is not, as he fancies, 'the dream of an enthusiast.' It is an ideal which is often, even in our own day, attained in perfection; and which they who have been blessed in such attainment well know to be the normal and natural type to which the relations of the two sexes steadily tend to conform, even, to a certain extent, in the relations of family, friendship, and association, beyond and outside of the marriage union. The true function of men and of women is to be the complement each of the other. The effort to assimilate them is a step towards barbarism.

This is no place to deal with the great works of Mill's earlier life—the *Logic* and the *Political Economy*. They are still standard works which every student of these sciences is bound to master; they have exercised a really dominant influence over the thoughts of the thinking world, and they are doubtless destined to colour the minds of many students for some time to come. It is true that their authority has been rapidly waning since Mill's death; and they are, perhaps, as much undervalued now as they once were unduly extolled as manuals of final and absolute truth. Fifty years ago these works were the textbooks of a large and influential school of students: especially at Oxford; and, as is the unhappy fate of textbooks, they were regarded by the youthful philosopher as infallible

revelation. This, of course, they are not; nor is either of them the summary of a coherent and complete system of thought. In the *Political Economy* especially we find two incompatible schemes of thought; and the first and the second volumes of the *Logic* are not wholly consistent throughout. The truth is that Mill, for all his apparent proof armour of dry logic, was continually moved by what has been called 'the logic of feeling.' He was excessively sensitive and indeed impressionable; and was often carried away by new ideas and intense feelings. In the course of his career he passed through the tremendous grinding of Bentham and James Mill's cast-iron machine, and ultimately ended in social utopias and sentimental ideals. It was said of the great Condorcet that he was a volcano covered with snow. And Mill had something of that temperament—without, a method of severe logic, within, intense sympathy and aspirations after new ideals. Both of these may be traced in most of his writings, in antinomies that he failed to harmonise, of which he is obviously unconscious himself.

This is especially marked in the *Political Economy*, which went through three modifications, as has been explained by Professor Ingram, who has admirably described both its weakness and its strength. It has been, as he says, the source from which most of our contemporaries have derived their knowledge of the science. And it still remains the most important English textbook of the older school. It marks an epoch. For if it cannot be said to be the introduction to the new methods with which our generation approaches economic problems, it undoubtedly closes the canon of the older methods, for in its final form, and still more in connection with Mill's later economic

doctrines, it makes admissions and encourages ideals of a social future which knock the ground from under the feet of the old orthodox school of abstract dogmas and unlimited Competition. Of this tendency Mill himself was quite aware, and he admitted that he had imbibed it in the school of Saint-Simon and Comte. But if the absence of any coherent scheme is a defect in the *Political Economy*, the fact that it combines so much of sound reasoning on economics with a serious attempt to expand plutonomy into sociology, makes it the most valuable general treatise which our language in this century has produced.

The *Examination of Sir W. Hamilton's Philosophy* is so full of acuteness, of interest, and of pregnant argument as to make one regret that Mill's chief metaphysical work should have been cast in a controversial form. It would have been far better had he stated his own metaphysical position in a systematic body of doctrine. He has not altogether satisfied such thinkers of his own school as Professor Bain, G. H. Lewes, and Herbert Spencer. Few metaphysicians, alas! ever satisfy any of their fellow-philosophers. But although there is much in this most interesting criticism of Hamilton that has not won general assent or even a very important following, the volume as a whole contains so many characteristic and memorable lines of thought, and has so much that is at once subtle and rich with sterling good sense, that it is especially valuable in this age of Intuitional Reaction and in the welter of half-hearted hypotheses in which we are told to-day that true philosophy consists.

With the work on *Auguste Comte and Positivism* I shall not deal, for it has been treated so exhaustively by Dr. Bridges in his admirable reply, and I have in

other places dealt with it at such length that I have nothing further to add. I associate myself entirely with the whole of Dr. Bridges' essay. He has amply shown how very large and fundamental are the points of agreement between the two, and how deeply Mill has assimilated the philosophical, ethical, social, and religious ideas of Comte. Mr. Leslie Stephen states it truly when he says, 'Comte's influence upon Mill was clearly very great, especially in his general view of social development.' It has been remarked by Professor Bain and by Professor Ingram that Mill had been influenced by Comte far more than he was himself disposed to believe. Readers of Bain's *Life of Mill* and of Mill's own *Autobiography* will observe how early, how intimate, how profound was the effect of Comte's work upon the mind of Mill. The grand difference—whereon they eventually parted company—was that Mill was (in theory) an Individualist, whilst Comte was (philosophically speaking) a Socialist. To Comte synthesis was the aim: to Mill it was independence. Both aimed at combining liberty and duty. But Mill would put liberty first: Comte gave the prerogative place to duty.

In the supreme point of religious aspiration there is essential agreement. It is clear, from a concurrence of testimony, that Mill looked forward to what in his last considerable piece he describes as 'that real, though purely human religion, which sometimes calls itself the Religion of Humanity and sometimes that of Duty.' In his last interview with John Morley he expressed the same thought. The three posthumous *Essays on Religion* develop and expound it. Written at intervals of some twenty years, they are not quite consistent; and to Bain and Morley they present certain diffi-

culties hard to reconcile with each other and with their knowledge of the writer. The last essay, on *Theism*, admits, in a loose and sentimental way, a certain *concurrent* and purely hypothetical Theism as likely to aid and colour the Religion of Duty. This Comte himself certainly did not contemplate, and all Christians and most Theists would reject it with scorn. But Mill's religion was not after Comte's model, though it virtually amounted to the same result. Fairly considered, the three posthumous *Essays on Religion* do not vary more than the development of a single mind over twenty years may explain. They combine to surrender all forms of belief in the Supernatural, in Revelation, or Christianity, and they practically close with a definite acceptance of the Religion of Humanity, as in some form or other the permanent religion of the Future.

With Mill's political activity and his writings on politics we are not now concerned. They belong to his own generation, not to ours. And, however rich with light and leading to the movements which they founded or inspired, their effect was in no sense either so great or so permanent as that of his books. His whole conduct in public was that of a courageous, conscientious, and noble-minded citizen, who gave his countrymen a rare example of how to play that most perilous of all parts—the philosopher as ruler. Whether we agree or not with all his aims, his bearing was always a combination of patience, justice, a lofty morality, and unflinching courage.

In summing up the peculiar powers of Mill and his special services to English thought, it would seem that his work marks a certain transition or combination between two very different movements, and also the

return to the fusion between French and English ideas. Hume, Gibbon, Priestley, Godwin, and Bentham, with the societies around them, had saturated Englishmen with the philosophical and political ideas of France. Scott, Coleridge, and Carlyle saturated them with German romanticism and philosophy. The influence of Mill again was almost wholly French, and to a very small degree German. In spite of the formal reasoning of his method, and the laborious precision of his form, he can hardly claim the highest rank as an original, or systematic, thinker. He is neither so original nor so systematic as Bentham or Spencer. And nearly all his work shows evidence of competing currents which are far from completely harmonised. His social philosophy is made up of Bentham and Comte, his economics of plutonomy tempered by socialism, his metaphysics are based, either by agreement or antagonism, on Sir W. Hamilton. His *Liberty* is deeply coloured by the memory of his father, and the *Subjection of Women* is an echo of his romantic devotion to his wife.

Yet as one turns over the roll of Mill's labours in philosophy, in metaphysics, in ethics, in economics, in sociology, in politics, in religion, it is difficult to believe but that such solid achievement will have a permanent place in English thought, although it may never regain its original vogue. In any case, the name of Mill must stand as the most important name in English philosophy between Bentham and Spencer. But, to the diminishing band of those who knew him, it will be his nobility of nature which dwells deepest in their memory, rather than his sagacity of mind. And those who did not know him should read in his *Autobiography* the modest yet resolute presentment of

a life of indefatigable industry, conscientious effort, and beautiful ideals. The sensitiveness to social improvement and the passionate nature of his own affections, which led him so to exaggerate the gifts of his own dear ones, and to plunge into such social revolutions, not seldom overpowered his science and involved him in inconsistencies, little to be expected from the external form of logical and patient induction. The inconsistencies and sophisms will be forgotten, as his great services to thought and his sympathetic trust in humanity are more and more remembered and prized.

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